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SIGNS

Beyond the Gaze: Recent Approaches to Film Feminisms

Special Issue Editors
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Introduction

Recent Approaches to Film Feminisms

Once dominated by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis and focused on "the gaze," "sexual difference," "desire," and "lack," feminist film theory and media work have become an increasingly heterogeneous and dynamic set of concepts and practices. Scholars and artists have not only broadened their scope and objects of study to include both television and digital media so that film is regarded as only one medium of moving image representation and expression; they have also responded affirmatively, if critically, to the challenge of difference: differences among women, among theoretical and critical approaches to women's media work, and among modes of moving image production employed by women for diverse purposes. Whereas earlier film feminism had a primarily Anglo- and Eurocentric focus, now a global perspective comparatively aligns disparate feminisms, nationalisms, and media in various locations and across class, racial, and ethnic groups throughout the world. This special issue of *Signs* provides a forum for the new film and media feminisms emerging now, more than twenty-five years after the "first wave" of feminist film theory. Accordingly, we have selected work that theoretically, historically, and/or critically either discusses or demonstrates film feminism as not only a changing conceptual apparatus but also as a pluralistic cultural praxis. To this end, the issue incorporates three different formats of scholarly production.

The issue begins with a roundtable that assesses the current "state of the discipline" as well as how the field of film and media studies has changed over the past decades. Ten major feminist film and media scholars were invited to participate, most of them among the first to theorize the significance of sexual difference and gender as both informed not only films but also the processes of spectatorship. We asked these scholars what feminism and feminist film theory meant to their work now and raised a series of related questions: Does feminist film theory still exist as such—or has it been absorbed or diffused by broader and more global theories of media, culture, and gender? What are the histories of film feminisms that have not been told? Does psychoanalytic theory still have something

to offer feminist inquiry into the affect and effects of media? How might feminist film theory avoid parochialism and address an ever-expanding media culture? As you will see, the responses are diverse (and often divergent), occasionally (and provocatively) reluctant, and extremely lively and impassioned.

The more traditionally framed theoretical and critical essays that follow the roundtable represent the perspectives of one established media scholar and a generation of up-and-coming media scholars. Their work rediscovers, tests, and revises the efficacy of film and media feminism as it is directed toward new theoretical concerns and objects of inquiry: the rethinking of "firsts" and authorship in an early cinema history that focuses on women; black feminist film practice within the context of Hollywood's dominance of the image and industry; a reassessment of the gaze in relation to alienation, alterity, and shame; the theorization of transnational cinemas; and the critical strategies and new representational possibilities of digital art. In the most general sense, these essays demonstrate how feminist "new historicism" has interrogated and challenged the construction of traditional historical narratives, how cultural theory has reframed questions of gender and representation, and how feminist film theory now addresses an ever-expanding media culture. Some of the essays present arguments that include but extend beyond academic feminist discourse into the broader public sphere; others take up questions of "the gaze," transforming its earlier feminist contours in the interest of previously excluded subjects, new media formats, and the more polymorphous possibilities of visuality and spectatorship.

In addition to the roundtable and essays, we have included three interactive pieces taking three distinct forms—interview, conversation, and shared meditation. These contributions feature scholars who are also filmmakers, media activists, curators, and film distributors in wide-ranging and historically inflected discussions of their theoretical and practical engagements with film and media feminisms. In the canon that has come to represent feminist film theory, history, and praxis, some intellectual trajectories have overshadowed others, resulting, for example, in the struggle by minoritarian filmmakers and scholars for—and over—representation; in the relative failure to consider women in the media workplace; and in the financial, political, and cultural conundrums that complicate their work.

Our volume concludes with a list of films recommended for viewing. We compiled these from submissions by the contributors, who were asked to name five of their favorite and critically important feminist films. This list reaffirms the message of the overall volume—that film feminisms and

these films called feminist have a diverse history and a broad, contradictory, and compelling range.

Finally, the editors would like to express their deep appreciation to a group of people, departments, and research centers whose generous contributions made the production of this volume possible. They are: Leonard Binder, director, UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies; Chris Littleton, director, UCLA Center for the Study of Women; Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, codirectors, UCLA Transnational and Transcolonial Research Group; Chon Noriega, director, UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center; and Robert Rosen, dean, UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television.

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Roundtable: Film Feminisms

Theorizing the Bachelorette: "Waves" of Feminist Media Studies

Lynn Spigel

Last summer I moved houses, and this meant I had some time to weed through my book collection, which had grown in unwieldy directions. To save space, I put my old feminist film theory books down in the basement. This, for sure, was a meaningful gesture. It meant I no longer really regarded these books as "primary" texts I needed for writing but rather as "storage." Still, they are not just dusty remnants but rather a kind of quotidian archive, foundational for everything I write.

Unlike its historical relation to established academic fields, feminism was central to the growth of film studies, which matured as a discipline in the 1970s. When I came into this world in the early 1980s, my library consisted of film books; books about narrative theory, psychoanalysis, feminist theory, and Marxist theory; and an assortment of books by Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault. The feminist scholarship in film theory, inaugurated most centrally by Laura Mulvey's 1975 "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," opened up debates about the politics of looking and recommended the use of psychoanalysis as a weapon against the patriarchal structures of Hollywood cinema. Yet the desire women scholars had to watch these films also meant that feminist film theory soon became riveted on the issue of how to account for female pleasure in the cinema. Somewhere in the midst of this, I bought a television set—and, more important, started thinking about why I felt so constricted by the protocols of feminist film theory, especially what has come to be known as gaze theory.

Before I go on, I should come clean by saying that I write about television and cultural history, and I almost never engage directly with feminist film theory in my work. The reasons for this are not at all clear to me. While I was inspired by it and formed through it, feminist film theory did not seem to answer—at least in any fully achieved way—the questions I had about cultural texts and practices. The growing field of

cultural studies, and in particular feminist cultural/media studies, offered different ways to think about television (although it is important to note that television scholars still often use ideas from feminist film and literary theory).

Feminist television studies in the humanities grew up in the late 1970s through the mid-1980s when feminist cultural critics such as Angela McRobbie and Trish McCabe (1981), Tania Modleski (1982), Janice Radway (1984), Ien Ang (1985), Michelle Mattelart (1986), and Patricia Mellencamp (1986) offered ways to think about why female-targeted genres like soaps, sitcoms, or romance novels are meaningful to so many women.[1] Feminist critics challenged the male-defined canon of "great art" (as well as the rather hypocritical degradation of women's genres by men, who seemed to have no problem allowing male-associated genres—westerns, gangster films, and so forth—into the canon of great films). They also challenged the early women's movement's often downright hostile attitude toward popular culture by showing how prior feminists had overlooked the possibly utopian, or at least contradictory, dimensions of everyday life and media culture. Importantly, however, even while feminist media critics wanted to take women's genres seriously, they also maintained a negative critique of patriarchy and the female isolation/alienation that popular culture often maintains and encourages.

Over the past twenty years, feminist television critics have broadened and redirected this cultural critique. They have considered how television depicts and addresses women as housewives, single moms, career women, lesbians, feminists, postfeminists, and "girls."[2] They have examined how media's depictions of sex and gender relate to ethnicity, race, and class.[3] They have conducted ethnographic/qualitative audience research as well as historical studies to understand the gendered dynamics of viewing in domestic and public spaces.[4] They have focused on female fans and broader issues of audience interpretation.[5] They have theorized television and new media's aesthetic modes and spectator positioning.[6] And they have ex-

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[1] For a historical overview and extensive bibliography of feminist television studies, see Brunsdon, D'Acci, and Spigel 1997.

[2] For examples, see the bibliography in ibid.

[3] See, e.g., Bobo and Seiter 1991; Bodroghkozy 1992; Lipsitz 1992; Torres 1998; Haralovich and Rabinovitz 1999; Nakamura 2002.

[4] See, e.g., Morley 1986; Gray 1992; Spigel 1992; Seiter 1999; McCarthy 2000.

[5] See, e.g., Lewis 1992; Penley and Bergstrom 1997; Thomas 2002.

[6] See, e.g., Mulvey 1986; Joyrich 1996; Morse 1998.

plored issues of gender and sexuality in the context of nationalism, diaspora, and globalization.[7]

I am also inspired by feminist historiography, histories of women's leisure and female audiences, and writings on the class, sexual, and race politics of moving-image culture by such historians as Kathy Peiss (1986), Mary Carbine (1990), Miriam Hansen (1991), Shelly Stamp (2000), Anna Everett (2001), Jane Gaines (2001), and Linda Williams (2001). So, too, I am inspired by the imaginative writing on film, media, and historical memory by, for example, Samuel Delany (1999), Annette Kuhn (2002), and Janna Jones (2003), which reminds us that the past is always also present.

While putting myself on the side of cultural studies and history, I do not find it useful to think of theory and history as antithetical pursuits. Too often, feminist media history is itself historicized as a move away from theory and seen as a kind of instant remedy for psychoanalytic film theory's universalizing aspects and blind spots, particularly with regard to issues of race and ethnicity. Without rehearsing the history of debates on these blind spots and, for some, the downright impossibility of psychoanalysis and gaze theory, I would just point out that feminist film historians still often have implicit or explicit engagements with the questions about pleasure and identification derived from the psychoanalytic model of feminist film theory. As Gaines has recently argued in her study of early race films, rather than discard it entirely we need to ask where the model can be useful, where it cannot, and where we can find alternative models (2001, chap. 2). To be sure, we do not "solve" the problems of film theory just by tacking more differences (race, class, ethnicity) onto the psychoanalytic model. This approach runs the risk not only of creating false equivalences out of differently situated histories and identities but also of colonizing all identities under the banner of psychoanalysis.

In light of the search for new models, I find that my library is more diversified than it was in the past. The increased focus on interdisciplinarity has opened up feminist media scholarship to a range of perspectives. Although this urge to read across disciplines can lead to fantasies of "mastery," from my point of view interdisciplinarity is not about being a "know-it-all." Instead, at its best, interdisciplinary research opens up questions that we might not ask within the confines of our own field.

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[7] See, e.g., Allen 1995; Gillespie 1995; Mankekar 1999; Berry, Martin, and Yue 2003

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First waves, second waves, third waves, airwaves

Today, there is an unfortunate revision of the feminist past secured through a rather slippery historical construction (in both academic and popular culture) of the "waves." With both its oceanic and avant-garde connotations, the waves thesis works to place old feminists on the beach—washed up like fish on the shore. Meanwhile, as in all teleological narratives, the "new" feminist (regardless of her age) is somehow taken to be an immersive body, fully refreshed by the sea change and outfitted in new feminist swimsuit styles. Having been there and done that, the third-waver rolls past the past, and while she might pay her respect to the waves before her, somehow prior feminisms are represented as something we have "overcome."

To be sure, the wave thesis—and in particular the figures of the post-feminist and "girl"—have become primary subjects of popular culture itself. The new waves of postfeminism and postnetwork media systems are connected in complex ways. Unlike the older three-network broadcast system, the new multichannel, multinational television system is based on "narrowcasting" (programming designed for niche tastes and demographics). In this narrowcast media context, programs ranging from *Ally McBeal* to *Buffy* to "reality" dating games like *The Bachelorette* market themselves according to a postfeminist logic that embraces femininity and "girliness" in the name of enlightenment and female empowerment. Even the "tits-and-ass" programs from the 1970s—most obviously *Charlie's Angels*—have been repackaged through discourses of postfeminism and girl power.

Many of us (including myself) often enjoy these programs. Yet as numerous feminists have argued, that pleasure should never be used as the justification for their existence—nor should these programs' popularity with women be seen as proof of generational transcendence past the "cranky" mothers of feminist film theory. Rather, it seems to me, the fact that I watch and (sort of) like *The Bachelorette*—and the fact that my students (sort of) do as well—raises complex questions that the literature on pleasure and fantasy in feminist film theory can help to explain.

So how best to theorize the new wave? Tracing the waves through media evolutions from June Cleaver to Mary Richards to Clair Huxtable to Buffy may have a certain commonsense logic, but such shortcut homologies between changes in media and changes in feminism per se are hardly satisfying as a historical explanation.[5]

Rather than thinking in waves of feminism and media images, I propose

we concentrate on feminist media studies itself as a "discursive formation" (Foucault 1972) that is composed of a variety of discursive practices and that is informed by "popular" feminisms in the broader sphere of culture. These discursive formations do not necessarily follow a neat historical timeline, evolution, or revolution, although we can trace their genealogy across time. For now, my hypothetical genealogy of feminist media criticism is really a simple recounting of the various forms through which feminists have criticized media and its audiences. Although these discursive practices are often intertwined, for heuristic purposes I can separate them out by example: (1) advice, (2) criticism, (3) manifesto, (4) theory, (5) history, (6) autobiography, and (7) ethnography.

The first two discursive practices can be traced to media workers and in particular to women who wrote for women's magazines. The advice column (which itself grew out of nineteenth-century domestic manuals) is associated with women's everyday life (cooking, cleaning, child rearing), but in the postwar period women's magazines also included nascent critiques of the housewife role and "woman's place." In 1962, Helen Gurley Brown published one of the most famous examples of this mode—*Sex and the Single Girl*—a book that (vaguely) used the insights of 1950s sexology to advise women on how to extend their girlhood into their thirties and take advantage of the pleasures of being a career-girl "bachelorette."

Brown was not known as a political feminist or a media critic—but she was certainly a powerful woman media worker who came to have a special voice in women's culture via *Cosmopolitan*. In *Sex and the Single Girl*, Brown advises women, "Have a TV set for quiet little evenings at home and shows of major importance but not too great a TV set or you'll never get out of your apartment. One of the impressive-income girls I mentioned . . . is still viewing on a 9-inch set for this reason" (1962, 135–36). Yet despite her parsimony, Brown also advises women that television is a great career path to success (her models are Madelyn Martin, cowriter of *I Love Lucy*, and film/television producer Joan Harrison, a graduate of Oxford who produced the television show *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* [Brown 1962, 92]).

This advice mode persists today in numerous popular media forms. Magazines aimed at girls and women are still associated with powerful women media workers—especially Oprah Winfrey (who advises us what to watch and read on her television show, in her magazine, and, of course, in her book club). Advice discourse is also common to Grrrl Power's investment in cultural styles and is used in handbooks like Carla Sinclair's *Net Chick: A Smart-Girl Guide to the Wired World* (1996). And the advice mode is embroiled in feminist media scholarship if only because the fem-

inist thinks she knows how other women should do something. That is, she thinks she knows how women should read cultural texts, and she tries to transform women into feminist readers by giving them interpretive tips.

The second discursive mode—criticism—was most fully inaugurated by Betty Friedan's best-selling book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which aimed to disclose the occluded oppressions of being a woman—or at least a middle-class housewife—in the postwar media-saturated world. Like Brown, Friedan had worked for women's magazines. But *The Feminine Mystique* turns the magazine discourse of advice inside out through the rhetoric of criticism. Friedan's second chapter is in effect an early example of feminist media criticism, as it traces female heroines in women's magazines from their career girl adventure roles in the late 1930s to the "happy housewife heroine" of the postwar world (the woman who sacrifices career for marriage). Friedan's book was so widely read that she even went on to write a 1964 article for *TV Guide* critiquing the "feminine mystique" on television (1964a, 1964b).

By the 1970s, feminist film criticism had developed into a discursive practice—particularly with the 1974 trade book publication of Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (1974). Like Brown and Friedan, Haskell was a media worker (she wrote film reviews for the *Village Voice* but also wrote for *Vogue* and *Mademoiselle*). Throughout the 1970s, feminist media criticism also developed within university contexts. Writing from a social scientific perspective, some scholars explored images of women via content analysis and image criticism.[9] From a more humanities-based perspective of feminist theory, Carole Lopate's (1977) and Tania Modleksi's (1979) essays on daytime television moved away from image analysis per se toward issues of everyday life and female experience and also, in Modleski's case, questions of female narrative pleasure imported from the then-burgeoning work in feminist film theory. In short, these feminist writers took on the role of what Roland Barthes called the "mythologist," the critic who reveals the semiotic binaries through which myths create meaning (Barthes [1957] 1972). This discursive practice, of course, continues today in both journalism and scholarly publications.

A third discursive practice, the manifesto, has been central to many modern avant-garde movements. This is a form full of imperatives and injunctives, a call to arms couched in the rhetoric of battle. Feminist manifestos have traditionally been associated with more radical separatist

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[9] Notable examples are Tuchman, Daniels, and Benet 1978; Cantor 1979, Cantor and Pingree 1983.

feminisms (such as Valerie Solanas's 1968 publication *S.C.U.M. Mani-festo*). More recently, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (both young media workers at *Ms.*) appropriated this form for their book *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (2000). *Manifesta* is a "pop" account of third-wave, next-generation feminism that winds up sounding like a pastiche if not an homage to second-wavers, especially Gloria Steinem. However, as self-declared third-wavers, Baumgardner and Richards also distinguish themselves from their "mothers"—and such distinctions are largely achieved through their more immersive relationship with popular media of all sorts, which they consider coextensive with (as opposed to antithetical to) feminist activism.[10]

Feminist media scholars have also taken their cue from the manifesto form. Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" began with language of battle: "Psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriated here as a political weapon" (1975, 6). Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985) is the most overt and notable example of the form. Haraway turned the "mythologist" figure of feminist film criticism (and structuralism) around via a poststructuralist deconstruction of mythic binaries and created her own "ironic myth" of the cyborg (a figure that transcends differences—sexual or otherwise—by combining human, animal, and machine). Although first published in *Socialist Review*, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" has since been appropriated by feminist media theory, especially in work on new media and science fiction.

Although theory is intertwined with all modes of feminist writing, it is also the discursive practice most closely associated with the rise of feminist film studies per se and signifies a particular set of problematics and a particular mode of inquiry. Developed out of French feminisms, psychoanalysis, Marxism, structuralist linguistics, poststructuralism, and film criticism, theory has never been a singular practice, although it has had a certain overarching historical influence on feminist media scholars. Beginning in the 1970s, the film journals *camera obscura* and *Screen* were central conduits for this discursive practice, and since then feminist film theory has enjoyed wide circulation in journals and by university presses. Yet unlike the advisor or the critic, the theoretician has often been divorced from the general public. (You could never imagine her work published in *TV Guide!*)

Feminist film and television history is often itself historicized as a reaction to a crisis in feminist film theory—or at least a reaction to the

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[10] Note that the authors do at times critique media, but they do so in the context of their own immersion in media culture

universalizing tendencies in gaze theory.[11] Yet as I suggested earlier, feminist film and television histories are often in dialogue with the questions posed by feminist film theory. For this reason the two fields are continuous, and many of the people who write history have been schooled in theory and vice versa. The hybridization of theory and history has meant that history has developed very specialized "theory reading protocols" that can at times reduce complex historical problems to reified theoretical paradigms. So too, this kind of hybridized theory/history places the feminist historian in the same "rarefied" position as the theoretician, and her specialized knowledge often works to divorce her from wider reading publics.

The last two discursive practices, autobiography and ethnography, can be traced, respectively, to the memoirs of media workers and audience/leisure studies of the first half of the twentieth century (such as the Payne Fund Studies or Robert Lynd and Helen Lynd's *Middletown* [1929, 1937]).[12] In contemporary feminist media studies, however, autobiography and ethnography have taken up questions of self and other, and in this regard many media scholars who engage in these discursive practices have taken their cue from critical anthropology and literary criticism.[13] Feminist media autobiographies and ethnographies are now what Brunsdon sees as part of the "fragmented" mode of feminist media scholarship in which the category "woman" becomes profoundly problematic and sex and gender are fractured by a whole range of other social identifications (1993).

These discursive practices (advice, criticism, manifesto, theory, history, autobiography, and ethnography) seem to me together to constitute the discursive formation that we call feminist media studies. But rather than thinking that these discursive practices are somehow exhaustive, it is more apt to recall Foucault's premise that discourse operates on a principle of "rarity" (see Foucault 1972, chap. 4). In other words, out of all the possible statements one could make about media and sex and gender, these are the limited groups of statements that are spoken at a specific historical moment and that circulate among feminist media critics. These discursive practices therefore limit our knowledge and expectations about

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[11] There were, of course, histories of women in the cinema before the development of "feminist" historiography per se; I am speaking here of a very particular project that developed in the context of feminist film studies circa 1980.

[12] The Payne Fund Studies were conducted by reformers/social scientists who focused on film's effects on children and adolescents; see, e.g., Lynd and Lynd 1929, 1937.

[13] See, e.g., Trinh 1989; Wallace 1990; Ang and Hermes 1991; Bobo and Seiter 1991; hooks 1992, Walkerdine 1997; Citron 1998; Kuhn 2002.

what will be said in the future. This is, of course, a very different idea than origins and evolutions and new waves.

Media workers

Perhaps the greatest change in feminist media studies is our conception of our own agency within the broader sphere of media culture. In the mid-1970s to early 1980s there was a sense that feminist criticism might challenge and change the male-defined cinema and television industries. But today we almost never hear about how our work might relate to media production. As many feminists (including myself) grew to embrace their own love of pop culture, and as many feminists began to study fans and their own fan sensibilities, we somehow had less and less to say about the industrial control of culture—or the ways in which feminist criticism might intervene in production.

Having studied and worked in Los Angeles for many years, I know just how deeply angry many women media workers are at their situations. I also know how difficult it can be to relate to these same Hollywood women. They often turn on you the minute you say anything "intellectual" or vaguely threatening to their own notions about women, sexuality, art, storytelling, and (if the word is used at all) feminism. Last year I was on an advisory board with some very accomplished women television producers who were openly bitter about the fact that they were fifty and out of work, save for their independent theater productions or odd jobs. One of these women had worked (in a high-level position) on the 1980s sitcom *Murphy Brown*. Whenever the topic of newer shows (such as *Friends* or *Sex and the City*) came up, she clearly felt angry that these shows were receiving kudos for the very plots (such as Rachel's out-of-wedlock pregnancy on *Friends*) that *Murphy Brown* had pioneered.

Everyday issues of female labor should be brought back into media studies—not because women behind the cameras equals feminism as we like it (Lord knows, I hated *Murphy Brown*!) but because we run the risk of becoming so estranged from the actual production of culture—and women's place in it—that we too readily accept our role as consumers (if critical and "tactical" consumers) of media products. However, I still don't mean that the only practical outcome of feminist scholarship is production (that "real world" bias that still plagues academic feminist media studies). I love teaching and writing, and these scholarly practices seem to me worth defending. Students may adore television and watch more than we can imagine, but they also want to learn critical tools to unpack it. Teaching is to me really where television meets its match—not because, as John

Hartley argues, teachers discipline television by teaching students to hate television but because teaching television provides just the opposite possibility.[14] It undisciplines the classroom by introducing the everyday into the canonical realms of knowledge. For me, this is what feminist media scholarship has always been centrally about. And this is why I think feminism has a future.

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[14] See, esp., chap. 6, where Hartley (1999) discusses the moral dimensions of the textual tradition of television studies

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I

The State of Film and Media Feminism

Annette Kuhn

From the mid-1970s until around 1990, I was actively involved in "film feminism." Although not a career academic for most of that period, I was doing a lot of teaching and writing and, for several years during the 1980s, conducting doctoral research in the social history of cinema. I got into feminist film studies in the first place because I was a cinephile and a student of film. I was (and am) also a feminist, and there was a period when it seemed politically urgent to bring these commitments and enthusiasms together—in one's work and practice. That moment has, I think, passed—to a degree because many of the battles have been won. But in different ways and to various degrees that moment has been formative of the disciplines of film and media studies, shaping their content and conduct as well as the habits of thought of those of all genders and generations who work in those fields.

This change of consciousness goes beyond the academy, too: themes and motifs in films that might thirty years ago have seemed commonplace or gone unremarked (women in peril, say) are treatable on screen today, if at all, only ironically or in some other distanced manner. If we choose to be optimistic about the impact of our work, we may conclude that this is a measure of the consciousness-raising potential of scholarship and teaching. At the same time, if the political energy that brought about these changes is still there, it seems to require less proclamation. So if in my own work feminism is still a sine qua non, it seems less necessary, less urgent, to say so. It is built in, can be taken for granted.

Cinema and film remain my main areas of interest, and I am aware that these have changed in all sorts of ways since I first got involved in film studies. Nonetheless, the seductiveness of "new media" notwithstanding, I think it would be unwise to lose sight of the idea of film as a distinctive medium. Of course the nature of film's distinctiveness does not stay constant—this is something to be charted and explored. Film studies is a different discipline from what it was in the 1970s (and media studies scarcely existed then), and here I would like to explore three areas in which both disciplines seem to me to be evolving and to look at the issues around feminism in each of them. If I focus my discussion largely on film and cinema, this is not just because these are the areas with which I am most familiar but also because I think there are significant issues of media specificity here, and I want to avoid conflating different media. The three areas are: the ontology, aesthetics, and metapsychology of film; cultural studies of cinema (and other media); and social histories of cinema (and other media). I shall concentrate mainly on the first and offer some brief concluding remarks on the other two.

The ontology, aesthetics, and metapsychology of film

There is a distinction to be made straight away between film and cinema. I use the term *film* to refer to the distinctive textual features of the medium. By *cinema* I mean the entire industry or apparatus of cinema, that is, film texts along with the contexts and manner in which they are produced and consumed.

Inspired by the novelty of this very modern medium, the earliest theorists of film were keen to pinpoint what was different and distinctive about it and thus directed their inquiries at the ontology, the essential nature, of film and also at film's aesthetics (see, e.g., Balázs 1970). Later theorists expanded ontological concerns into metapsychological studies—

explorations of the distinctiveness of film's address to its spectators, of the relationship between the film text and the subjectivity of the spectator (Metz 1982). Are we at risk now of losing sight of the aesthetic and metapsychological distinctiveness of film—even if this is very different today from what it might have been in the medium's earlier years?

The task of theory is to illuminate its objects, and vice versa. Film theory should help us make sense of film, and films ought to be the grounding and the inspiration for film theory. In an essay from the late 1980s on the then-current state of feminist film theory, I wrote that theories of film do not translate automatically to other media (Kuhn 1989). This, I think, is still true. We need to take the objects, not the theory, as the starting point for our thinking and allow ourselves to learn from them in all their specificity, whether they be film, television, video, or whatever else. This is one reason why the idea of "applying" theory makes me uneasy: it feels rather a constraining, procrustean sort of exercise and rarely produces convincing or helpful results.

We are asked to consider whether psychoanalytic theory still has anything to offer feminist inquiry into the media. Psychoanalysis was used first of all in relation to film (as opposed to other media), and as I see it feminist psychoanalytic film theory sprang from two rather different desires: to understand the nature of film, in particular its metapsychology, in relation to sexual difference; and to understand how gender informs the contents of films and/or how men and women relate to film and/or cinema.

These desires come together in thinking on how psychoanalytic ideas on the production of sexual difference may contribute to a more general understanding of the interaction between films and those who watch them. In practice, however, they pull in opposing directions. The central preoccupations of the first do not readily map onto gender or other identity politics, in part because of the polymorphous range of subjectivities in the internal world. Feminine subjectivity is not the same as femaleness, and male subjectivity is not the same as maleness, and in the psyche many more subjectivities even than these are potentially available. More importantly, perhaps, psychoanalysis is as much, or more, concerned with the internal world of the psyche as it is with the external world of politics and social action. It is not that these worlds are separate and unrelated so far as psychoanalysis is concerned. Rather, they are different from each other, and it is the job of psychoanalysis to explore and explain their interrelation in particular cases rather than to assume it. The second desire springs from a more overtly political debate about women (or men) as

they appear in films and/or constitute an audience for them. For the sake of brevity, I shall call the two tendencies, respectively, "psychoanalytic" and "social."

Not surprisingly, these two tendencies constantly seem to anger or disappoint each other. For many feminists, the "psychoanalytic" tendency seems abstruse and unrelated to the "real world," a judgment scarcely mitigated by the difficulty of some of the writing in this area. Many have felt excluded from this debate, and such feelings generate resentment along with lack of understanding. Even those like myself who find psychoanalytic theory enormously helpful in thinking about film (and indeed about culture more generally) can struggle with this. As well, at a certain period, happily now past, a demand for compliance seemed to be in the air, especially around acceptance of the work of Jacques Lacan. This is the very sort of thing that makes people feel inadequate, and I certainly still have difficulty finding some of Lacan's work, particularly that around sexual difference, convincing. At the same time, I do not believe that this absolves me from trying to come to grips with it, and colleagues whose work I greatly respect have successfully done this and produced excellent feminist exegeses of—and challenges to—Lacan. The best of this work sheds light on the connections and the differences between Lacan and Sigmund Freud on the one hand and existential phenomenology on the other. Where it is linked with the metapsychological study of film, this work is particularly helpful and should be required reading for all students of film (Rose 1986).

From the standpoint of psychoanalytic theory the "social" tendency generates the demand that psychoanalysis explain phenomena that are beyond its scope. For example, psychoanalysis does not claim to deal with social aspects of gender and other social differences such as those of "race" and class. The very fact that we are asked to review the continuing relevance of psychoanalysis to the study of film (and other media) suggests that these differences remain unfinished business. This has made for a fraught encounter between feminist politics on the one hand and psychoanalytic film theory on the other. An immediate consequence of this is that at a certain point the two tendencies parted company and set off in quite different directions, without really acknowledging that a separation had taken place. The "social" strand inspired various kinds of cultural study of cinema and other media (on which more later), while the "psychoanalytic" tendency fed into various feminist-inspired metapsychologies of film, including theories of the masquerade, fantasy, and masochism (Doane 1982; Cowie 1984; Studlar 1984).

So what, if any, is the relevance of feminist psychoanalytic film theory

today? My first response to this question is to say that if I were working in cultural studies of cinema (or other media), psychoanalysis would not be my first port of conceptual or methodological call. In this area other approaches (such as cultural ethnography and audience research) have proven more productive. If psychoanalysis does offer any continuing relevance to understanding film (if not necessarily to understanding other media), it will be in a circumscribed arena, accompanied by the recognition that psychoanalysis cannot explain everything. It will also be with objectives that are not powered first and foremost by feminism *tout court*. That is, we might consider setting aside a totalizing feminist desire (I do not, of course, suggest that such a desire should be abandoned) and not being shy about concentrating on film as distinct from cinema and from other media. With these caveats in mind, I believe that psychoanalysis has a lot to offer film theory, in particular the metapsychology of cinema, in terms of depth of understanding and inspiration for further inquiry.

"Cinepsychoanalysis" has concerned itself largely with the psychical organization of looking and seeing, drawing on the psychoanalytic account of human development: it is for good reason that the subject of cinema is invariably called a *spectator*. This emphasis on vision calls up Freud's thinking on the drives and their activity in creating differences of social gender out of psychical sexual difference. We should remember that for Freud, one of the key processes at work here is repression, and therefore the Unconscious. To this extent, in Freudian terms, sexual-libido drives, including the drive to pleasurable looking (scopophilia), partake in the production of the Unconscious and have a central unconscious component. This is transported into and elaborated on in Lacan's thinking. To this extent, psychoanalytic theories of film spectatorship have rested on both the centrality of vision and the activity of the Unconscious, and these concerns have been carried over into feminist psychoanalytic film theory in work on "the gaze." While, as I shall suggest, psychoanalytic theories of the gaze can be seen as rather limiting, there is much work still to be done in this area. In particular, the key question in Christian Metz's seminal essay "The Imaginary Signifier" ("in what way can psychoanalysis cast light on the cinematic signifier?" [1982, 25]) has still not been satisfactorily answered.

This project was more or less abandoned in anglophone film theory, largely because Metz's work is not only gender blind (which would not necessarily make it untenable) but is also (unacceptably) dismissive of the sexual difference agenda informing the Freudian concepts on which it otherwise productively draws. To cite just one example, Metz rightly points to the role of disavowal ("I know this is not so, but I accept the

illusion for the time being") in organizing spectatorial belief and pleasure in film, arguing that to this extent the "cinematic signifier" is a fetish and/or that the spectator-film relationship is psychically analogous to that between the fetishist and his object. At the same time, though, Metz contrives to disregard Freud's main point about fetishism, which is that it arises from the disavowal of sexual difference (Freud 1977). It is possible that, as far as the metapsychology of film is concerned, the disavowal is more important than the sexual difference: we are not after all bound to the letter of Freud. But such a hypothesis calls for inquiry and argument.

What I am suggesting is that prefeminist psychoanalytic film theory, or film theory that does not prioritize issues of sexual difference, has been prematurely abandoned, and that psychoanalytic metapsychologies of film that do not take sexual difference as their starting point might be just as worthy of exploration as those that do. For the latter, feminist readings of Freud and Lacan have led the way in that for both Freud and Lacan the key arena of sexual difference is the Oedipal moment, when the infant recognizes the mother's "lack." However, while most feminist psychoanalytic film theory has followed this lead, a number of writers, feminist and otherwise, have argued for the significance of the pre-Oedipal in understanding the spectator-film relationship (Baudry 1974; Studlar 1984). Nonetheless, to the best of my knowledge, psychoanalytic work on early objects and how they get woven into the subject's experience of its world has yet to be thoroughly explored in relation to film as an object that inhabits both our inner and our outer worlds (Winnicott 1971; Konigsberg 1996). This area, for one, could be significant to the extent that it addresses at least two of the objections raised against psychoanalytic film theory.

It has become commonplace to observe that psychoanalytic film theory's emphasis on vision in the film-spectator encounter is partial, and that spectatorial engagements have been—and with certain kinds of cinema, such as IMAX, remain—more fully embodied than the idea of the gaze would suggest (Gunning 1986; Bukatman 1999). In addition to this, I would argue that the emphasis on the Unconscious in psychoanalytic film theory has resulted in a downplaying of the activity of partly or fully conscious aspects of the spectator's inner world in the encounter. That is, the spectator's *experience*, considered in psychoanalytic terms, might also be usefully addressed (Kuhn 1989, 2003).

In conclusion, then, I believe that, as a system of ideas that can illuminate film and in particular add to our understanding of what is at stake in the encounter between films and spectators, psychoanalysis has much to offer film theory. To the extent that psychoanalysis can shed light on the

question of how sexual difference organizes this encounter, film scholars who are also interested in questions of a broadly feminist nature will undoubtedly continue to follow or contribute to this rather specialized debate. However, I believe that the key agenda for psychoanalytic film theory lies elsewhere.

Cultural studies of cinema (and other media)

Psychoanalysis is unlikely to prove useful to feminists who are interested in cinema (as opposed to film), by which I mean those seeking to interrogate cinema for its engagements with women, sexual difference, sexual/gender identity, or sexual politics. Many of those who approach cinema from this angle do so from a base in disciplines other than film studies—media studies, cultural studies, and women's studies, for example, as well as more traditional disciplines like English, history, or sociology—and so may well be uninterested in the ontology, aesthetics, or metapsychology of film. In cultural studies of cinema, films or cinema are studied not in their own right but as they engage external issues: "race," gender, violence, and so on. By extension, media other than cinema are readily assimilable to this approach. Regardless of the medium, in cultural studies the time frame tends to be the present, the media contemporary.

Terms like *reflection* and *representation* characterize work that inquires into the relationship between media content (and occasionally formal organization) on the one hand and a range of social issues on the other. Cultural studies of media may also include inquiries into the consumption and uses of media. Because inquiry in these areas can appear deceptively straightforward until you try to do it properly, work in cultural studies of media can vary enormously in quality. Research methodologies in cultural studies are on the whole underdeveloped, and where they are not (as in certain types of audience research and media ethnography) research design can be complicated and the conduct of a good-quality investigation expensive and time consuming, often yielding disappointingly superficial findings. However, as long as there are media, and feminists interested in media, the demand for feminist cultural studies of media will remain. We owe it to the discipline and to our students to enhance methodological skills and awareness in this area.

Social histories of cinema (and other media)

While there is potential for overlap between cultural studies and social histories of media, in that cultural studies methods may be brought to

bear on historical media and their uses, in practice they remain effectively separate areas of inquiry. Unlike cultural studies, social histories of media have the benefit of established methodological protocols. As far as cinema is concerned, certainly, sources and methods of research are well documented, and film studies scholars have been pursuing innovative and distinctive lines of historical inquiry since the 1970s (Allen and Gomery 1985).

At the same time, there is still work to be done in feminist, as in other, social histories of the media, and excellent examples have been set in particular by some U.S. feminist scholars with backgrounds in film studies (see, e.g., Hansen 1991; Staiger 1995). Key areas of feminist inquiry include the history of women's contribution to the making of films and the history of women's activities as consumers of films, and the scope for new research in these fields is clearly potentially international. As far as feminist-informed work in film and media studies worldwide is concerned, this, in my view, is where to seek the cutting edge today.

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Aesthetics and Politics

Mary Ann Doane

I have found it extremely difficult to write this essay, procrastinating more than usual as each new requested "deadline" steadily approached and passed me by. Perhaps the blockage has to do with the fact that I have not really worked centrally in the area of "feminist film theory" for quite some time, or that feminism has informed my work in a more oblique, less visible way. Or perhaps it is linked to a feeling that, as Yogi Berra might say, "It's déjà vu all over again." Here I am thinking of the special issue of *camera obscura* that Janet Bergstrom and I edited in 1989, titled "The Spectatrix," which was a similar overview of feminist film theory/criticism/history that asked participants to reflect on the state of the field and its future directions, with special emphasis on the female spectator. On the cover of that issue, silent film vamp Theda Bara, looking down, sees her mirror reflection in a museum case containing a mummy, her reflected face framed precisely in the area where the mummy's face would have been, evoking all sorts of questions about time, preservation, the archive, and Bazinian notions about desire and death (Bazin 1967, 9–10). If mummification was a potent theme for film feminism then, already fourteen years ago, what about today?

Certainly, there is still a great deal happening in the area of film feminisms that has not yet been relegated to the museum. Scholars have expanded the purview of what was once a narrowly conceived and ethnocentric inquiry into Western heterosexual subjectivity that assumed the dominance of only one kind of difference—sexual difference. Transnational feminisms, queer theory, and analyses of racial, ethnic, and class differences have brought to the center subjectivities that had previously been both epistemologically and socially marginalized. New approaches in film history have focused on women's role in the early cinema as consumers, actresses, producers, and images (see, e.g., Jennifer Bean and Diane Negra's impressive new anthology, *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema* [2002]). And new media have produced novel questions about virtual sexualities and identities. All this is well known.

And yet, I am reminded in the midst of all this activity of Jean-François Lyotard's problematization of the simple notion that "it is happening," that something is happening (1991, 90). Indeed, there is a great deal happening within feminist film studies, particularly as it is inflected by cultural studies. Yet what seems to be lost in the flurry of this activity are some basic questions and, even more crucially, the desire to pursue basic questions, a desire that often goes by the name of *theory*. The term *theory* is frequently associated with a particular decade in film studies—the 1970s, with its intense concern with contemporary Continental explorations of subjectivity and ideology. Given film studies' emergence in the late 1960s and early 1970s and its relative youth and disciplinary instability, its encounter with the influential movements of semiotics, structuralism, and poststructuralism was characterized by an ease quite foreign to those in the established disciplines with a strong history of traditions, conventions, and discursive rules for the production of usable knowledge. The fact of this historical conjuncture of film studies and theory is rarely contested, but the readings of its implications are varied. For some, including myself, the historical conjuncture made film studies a particularly exciting site in which to rethink the very questions about objects, knowledges, subjects, and disciplines that had become institutionally entrenched. For others, the very absence of the arduous politico-epistemological struggles that took place in the established disciplines gave film studies the strange flavor of a premature orthodoxy in which theorists could speak from a position of marginality that was paradoxically central. Lesley Stern, for instance, has claimed that the feminist film theorist of the 1970s and 1980s advanced rapidly—almost abruptly—from the position of "young turkess" to that of "totalitarian mother" and that feminist film theory itself was "at once marginal and authoritarian" (Stern, Grace, and Jayamanne 1988,

119). Now it often seems to evoke a certain hardening, a totalization, a closed orthodoxy.

The apparent orthodoxy of "apparatus theory" (i.e., theory that understood the cinema as a fixed relation of spectator, projector, and screen, with certain psychical effects) and the early feminist film theory associated with it provoked a certain resistance to anything hinting of totalization or even generalization. This led to an intense concern with history and the archive, with the dispersal of subjectivities, and with a logic of the local, the specific, the individual. The strategy of localization entails a certain proliferation of objects (e.g., theatrical exhibition in Waukesha, Wisconsin, in 1926; film posters and their effects). There are no limits to the objects that can be subjected to analysis, but there is a general assumption that the objects are "out there" just waiting to be studied and that all we have to do is expand our range. There has been a great deal of criticism of the concept of a cinematic apparatus (including my own), but, to the credit of its theorists, it was an effort to actively think the limits and identity of an object of knowledge rather than to take for granted the prior existence of self-evident and indisputable objects (or subjects). Current film feminisms often ally themselves with the logic of the local and its corresponding suspicion of abstraction. And this, to my mind, is a grave error.

For there is at least one basic question that subtends the entire project of feminist film criticism and that has never been thoroughly addressed—the question of the relation between aesthetics and politics. As feminists, we have tended to assume that films are intimately allied with political effects (perhaps an outgrowth of the notion that "the personal is political"), that films have a direct impact on or are directly impacted by a hierarchical organization of sexualities and subjectivities. In fact, it seems hardly possible, unthinkable even, that feminist film theory could ground itself on any other assumption. The current tendency to divide and subdivide subjectivities in an effort to avoid the overgeneralization or totalization of the concept of "woman" rests on the premise that this impact (of film on society or society on film) is potentially infinitely complex, but nevertheless there, as the substrate of the feminist endeavor. The logical outcome of such a process of division, which is ultimately based on the premises of empiricism, is pure particularity, pure idiolect. This approach, which generates a great deal of discourse today, risks an aphasia of theory in which nothing can be said.

I invoked Lyotard's (1991) problematization of the notion "it is happening" above because he connects the dismantling of the unthought acceptance of the certainty of the event to art—and specifically to the

project of the avant-garde, which has a long history of being theorized in relation to aesthetics, autonomy, and politics. And the avant-garde was a crucial concern in the 1970s and early 1980s during the heyday of "theory" within feminist film studies. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey specified it as a negation of Hollywood cinema's inescapable complicity in the patriarchal ordering of sexual difference: "The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions (already undertaken by radical filmmakers) is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics, passionate detachment" (1975, 18). Much of the feminist film practice of the 1970s and 1980s allied itself with the avant-garde through a project of negation, a systematic interrogation and undermining of classical codes of sexual looking and imaging. It is this negativity at the heart of an affirmation of feminism that is most intriguing. Yet it was often a negativity lodged in formal categories, susceptible to the tendency to equate aesthetic radicalism and political radicalism (see Poggioli 1968), collapsing politics into aesthetics. As Andrew Hewitt has pointed out, "Once political judgments can be displaced onto formal considerations—once a text can be called 'progressive' by virtue of its formal qualities, and that judgment extended to its political aspects—the political itself becomes superfluous as a critical tool" (1993, 26). One of the difficulties of the feminist advocacy of the avant-garde in the 1970s lay ironically in its local approach, in its failure to situate these films in the larger theoretical context of a history of the avant-garde.[1]

The theory of the avant-garde and its history is potentially useful to feminism because it has been haunted by the insistent question of the autonomy of art and the desire to forge a link between aesthetics and politics. In other and stronger words, it should not be possible to accept the feminist assumption of an intimate articulation of aesthetics and politics—especially insofar as it has historically privileged the avant-garde as an alternative realm—outside of a thorough examination of the history of debates about aesthetic autonomy.[2] Peter Bürger (1984) traces a history

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[1] There have been a number of important works by feminists exploring the boundaries of the avant-garde in relation to women filmmakers and questions of the canon (e.g., Penley and Bergstrom 1978; Rabinovitz 1991). However, these do not address the broader questions of the general and historical relation between aesthetics and politics, the question of autonomy, and the place of mimesis in feminist film theory.

[2] I am neglecting all the debates about misogyny within the historical avant-garde because my purpose is to emphasize the historical and theoretical vicissitudes of the link between aesthetics and politics as it is more broadly understood. The avant-garde—even the historical

whereby art becomes increasingly autonomous with the breakdown of its connections to religion and court life. The apex of the autonomy is nineteenth-century Aestheticism and the "art for art's sake" movement, which involve a rupture of the relation between art and everyday life. Art hence comes to constitute a separate realm characterized precisely by its social ineffectivity. The historical avant-garde (movements of the 1920s such as surrealism and dada) attacked the institution of art for this insularity and tried to reconnect art and praxis. It failed, but it succeeded in revealing the institutional status of art. Nevertheless, institutionalized as art themselves, assimilated within the world of the museum, such movements were stripped of any political valence.

The rationalization characterizing capitalist modernity produced a process of differentiation within the public sphere that, among other effects, separated and distinguished aesthetics and politics. From one point of view, this autonomy isolated art from mass culture and hence the capitalist circuit of commodity exchange, allowing it to serve as a space of resistance or critique. On the other hand, such autonomy and specialization, deprived of effectivity, are no real escape and can easily be seen as part of the rationalization strategies of capitalism. According to Hewitt, the twentieth century witnessed a shift in modes of legitimating the autonomy of art. The earlier mode, the structural legitimation strategy (which Hewitt associates with the Frankfurt School), described art as an outlet from capitalist reification that allowed it to satisfy "residual needs" (1993, 62). The strategy that displaced it was a specifically aesthetic one, a mimetic one by means of which fragmentation in art (in modernism, the avant-garde) was perceived as a true or accurate representation of fragmentation in everyday life.[5] For Hewitt, all of this points to the fact that the problem of modernity is not a crisis or collapse of representation or of the mimetic tradition but its retention (1993, 66–67).

I do not have the space here to work out all the ramifications of this history of thinking about the avant-garde for film feminisms, but I am citing it for several reasons. First, it is crucial not to neglect an entire history of theorizing, of attempting to decipher the relation of aesthetics and politics. With the advent of cultural studies (the U.S. version), a certain political immediacy has become fashionable, often at the expense of a consideration of the aesthetic (within film studies this is manifested par-

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avant-garde—is by no means a cure or a utopian moment but a particularly dense and complex instance that brings these issues to a point of crisis

[5] For a discussion of the distinctions between the terms *modernism* and *avant-garde*, see Wollen 1982 and Willemen 1994

tially as a critique of the notion of cinematic specificity). Second, there has been a tendency to forget that the complex relations between aesthetics and politics have been historically structured through social, economic, and cultural determinants and, instead, to make the relation tantamount to a moral or ethical problem, a choice in effect, on the part of producer or receivers. Hence, filmmakers can choose (or not) to make feminist work; audience members can choose (or not) to create their own, potentially resistant, uses of the texts of mass culture (a degeneration of the concept of spectatorship that also neglects the fact that capitalism requires of its consumers a training in "choice"). In this respect, the solution is not to valorize the local but to theorize historically, to welcome abstraction. What are the ways in which aesthetics and politics have been figured in relation to each other? What are the grounds of their separation and the resultant attempts to bridge that distance? How has the avant-garde been thought of as both site of resistance and the failure of resistance? What are the relations between the avant-garde and mass culture with respect to questions of autonomy? If the division between aesthetics and politics is produced through processes of capitalist rationalization, can we simply force a merger?

Finally, the question of the avant-garde and its relation to mimesis is critical for feminism. For feminist film criticism inevitably runs up against the problem of representation. How are women represented? Can they be represented at all given the strength and tenacity of patriarchal modes of looking? The emphasis shifted fairly early from the issue of positive/ negative representations of women to modes of representation (the cinema as apparatus, voyeurism, fetishism, structures of desire) but remained ensconced within the realm of representation nevertheless. The avant-garde seemed to offer a way out of the dilemma precisely through its refusal of the totalization of representation, of mimesis, and its deflection of semiotic energy inward, toward the filmic medium. The negativity subtending the feminist avant-garde was an attempt to avoid the dangers of essentialism attendant on mimetic procedures, but it simply relocated mimesis at another level—that of the codes subjected to critique. The reflected entity— woman—had anyway begun to shatter into a spectrum of identities, which were contingent themselves on assumptions about mimesis. Is feminist criticism one of the final abodes of a reflection theory of art? Must its underlying theory of the relation between aesthetics and politics hinge on mimesis? What strategies should feminists adopt in view of the historical articulation of aesthetics and politics as separate spheres? These are questions that, to my mind, have never been asked as insistently and persistently

as they deserve. What is needed in feminist film studies now is not less theory (although this seems to be the prevailing trend) but more.

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Global Feminisms and the State of Feminist Film Theory

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n 2004, after approximately four decades of struggle, it seems that the futures of feminisms are (and have been) at stake across a number of arenas, including the academy, social and political policies, medicine, law, and other multicultural and multinational sites. But challenges in the wake of 9/11 seem greater than those of recent years. And it is the possible traumatic impact of worldwide catastrophes as they may affect future feminist agendas that I will shortly address. How does living with terror (as people in different parts of the world have been doing for decades) influence women's lives especially? How does it affect feminist ideas, research, and specific feminist agendas? How has 9/11 (within the U.S. context at least) destabilized prior apparently certain political affiliations, including feminist ones? Can feminists (and women more generally) within and beyond academia contribute fruitfully in this situation by virtue of our socialization? Indeed, have we arrived at the need for a "fourth" feminism in a so-called era of terror? For even if the era of terror is largely a U.S. media construction, this construction is already having profound effects on consciousness: it is having an impact on local and national policies as well as on economics (e.g., on jobs for women globally), and it is affecting social practices and ways of being in daily life, things that have always concerned feminists.

In another context, I have discussed four kinds of challenges future feminisms face because of feminist histories, leading up to a discussion of trauma (Kaplan 2003). I noted, first, the challenge of achieving some modest feminist goals; second, the challenge of what new directions past knowledge makes possible; third, the challenges that globalization and new technologies produce; and finally, the possible impact of trauma on feminist futures. The relevance of this framework to the present task of thinking about feminist film theory will, I hope, become clear. For, speaking personally, my own research has moved from a narrow (if pioneering, I suppose) focus in the late 1970s on the oppressions of white Western women as evidenced in cinematic images to sensing a need to address the traumatic situations that women globally have often confronted in the

past and continue to confront today. It is as if, even before 9/11 and the recent era of international terror, Eurocentric cultures were unable any longer to keep at bay collective memories of harm done to minority groups, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised. Repressed for many years, memories now return, forcing their way into public consciousness in different nations. While this is not the place to debate the vexed issue of the literal "truth" of such memories, it is important that there is new focus in academic research on the violence done to the other in the context of reconciliation and redress.

We do not need to reference Thomas Kuhn or Michel Foucault to note that cultures exist within discursive frameworks that are very hard to think beyond at any specific time. The same is true for academic discursive fields such as feminist film theory. While continuing to focus on images as material evidence of cultural fantasies, discourses, and realities, my new work looks at European and postcolonial traumatic situations in films by and about women, partly because there is now a discursive field to enable such research—a field missing when I began my feminism and film work. As Betty Joseph (2002) has pointed out, scholars who have focused on literary, art, and media texts often feel that they are out of touch with the large global events addressed by social scientists and ethnographers. But following Raymond Williams and Aihwa Ong, Joseph argues that the literary too may yet have an important role to play. Indeed, she suggests that, while art is apparently unique and individualistic, it is deeply communal in its implications. In art, subjectivity, including its unconscious aspects, becomes visible as social practice. In this way, art can address the politics of trauma, including the trauma of cross-cultural conflict that I have chosen to include in my new research on women and film.

Situating 1970s feminist film theories

As my title indicates, my new work and its methods respond to the new international, intellectual, and political conditions of the millennium. But a brief detour into the history of the intersection of feminisms and film will help readers understand the links among intellectual work, discursive frameworks, and sociopolitical realities (e.g., institutions, policies, demography, and law), as well as the evolution of my own work. In this short piece, I am not going to rehearse the "histories" of the sometimes intense debates in the 1980s around cinepsychoanalysis, since they are by now well known and have been discussed in anthologies of feminism and

film.[1] Rather, what I want to do is to situate these theories within their specific historical moment and to contrast that moment with today.

Feminist film theory was always "beyond the gaze," even if gaze theories evidently intimidated 1980s graduate students and seemed to dominate the field.[2] Due in part to their deliberate polemical nature, the impact of Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), along with Claire Johnston's "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema" (1973), was indeed dramatic: something about these interventions in their specific historical (political, intellectual, social) moment met needs within the then-developing area of women and film and captured scholars' interest. But if cinepsychoanalysis (as it came to be called) was perceived as "dominant," this was in part because scholars were choosing not to attend to already ongoing alternate theories and methods. Nor, perhaps, was it evident how much the field was itself developing through resistances and objections, corrections and qualifications to the original polemical forays. Indeed, the purpose of polemics is precisely to provoke. Their use is in structuring an arena for discussion and debate and in so doing creating something new.

The basis of 1970s and 1980s U.S. and British feminist film theory, whether "gaze" theories or not, was a strong passion to understand the specific oppressions women suffered, including their secondary status socially and politically. Women's objectification, with its related limitations on their desires and ambitions, seemed to be a root cause of their negative position in Western culture and on its cinema screens. Feminist film theory, then, originally involved a passionately ideological feminism.

The turn to metaphysics, language, and psychoanalysis arguably emerged through frustration with prior U.S. sociological role analyses that seemed simply to expand the current gendered organization (insisting on more male involvement in domesticity, for instance) instead of getting to the root cause of why women were given secondary status in the first place. Certain tropes and conventions, common in academic fields, began to develop in relation to a "male" gaze (itself premised on certain psychoanalytic theories regarding identification with the so-called mirror/

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[1] See, e.g., Penley 1988; Erens 1991; Thornham 1999; and, more recently, Kaplan 2000 and Bean and Negra 2002

[2] At the workshop on "Histories of Feminism and Film" at the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference in March 2003, several speakers referred to their experience of 1970s cinepsychoanalysis as "intimidating." Resentment about this intimidation evidently remains

screen) and the "silencing of women" (especially their objectification and relegation to secondary status in the symbolic order).

But these theories did not emerge in a vacuum: psychoanalytic, semiotic, and Althusserian film theories were appropriate to the cold-war era in that they looked back to Europe's nineteenth century—the moment when cinema and psychoanalysis emerged as part of a common discursive field linked to socialism, modernity, and its "shocks"—and reflected a world in which communism and capitalism were pitted against each other. In this light, a narrow critique of capitalist ideology (including its sexism) and studying the deployment of this ideology in Hollywood cinema made sense.

Obviously, from today's perspective the field had enormous gaps, such as its construction of an apparently monolithic "woman" who was really a white Western woman, its neglect of the specificity of minority and other marginalized women, its generally heterosexual and Eurocentric focus, and so on. In addition, there were objections to psychoanalytic film theory and criticism's apparent exclusion of the body; its equally apparent pessimism about social change because of its investment in linguistic theories; its incipient "whiteness," as noted; its ahistorical or even antihistorical bias. Scholars critiquing psychoanalytic theories refused the inherently Cartesian mind/body split, denied that language was totally determining, turned attention to cinematic practices and representations of minority and gay women, and, finally, filled in gaps in basic historical information by seeking to find out what women were actually accomplishing in Hollywood from its earliest days. In addition, British and U.S. television studies had an impact on psychoanalytic feminist film theory: as Tania Modleski (1983) and Charlotte Brunsdon (1983) persuasively argued in *Regarding Television* (Kaplan 1983a), the different medium of television necessitated different theories of the spectator/screen relationship. These theories, in turn, were seen to have some application to film, shifting the rather rigid theory of there being just one "male" gaze.[3]

Negative reactions to cinepsychoanalysis also arose from the difficulty of Lacanian/semiotic terminology and concepts. Indeed, perhaps because of this very problem there was a tendency to reduce the theories to manageable concepts (which I tried to do). This provoked further splits be-

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[3] For example, Linda Williams (1984) moved from her pioneering analysis of the implied sexism in Eadweard Muybridge's precinematic "gaze" to questioning the monolithic "male" gaze that by 1975 had become an accepted feature of feminist film theory. Meanwhile, Vivian Sobchack (1999a, 1999b) clung determinedly to a phenomenological approach to women in film that ran absolutely counter to the metaphysics of Lacanian and Saussurian theories.

tween scholars who were sympathetic to these theories (as I was) but realized much of the work as it stood was difficult to teach to undergraduates and those who continued to read Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud closely so as to give thorough and informed interpretations relevant to feminist film theory.[4]

In the many years between my two related books on feminist film theory—*Women and Film* (Kaplan 1983b) and *Looking for the Other* (Kaplan 1997)—U.S. culture and society changed dramatically, as did international relations. It took the collapse of the Soviet Union to open space for rethinking imperialism, and it took the increased flows of peoples across borders and into the academy to encourage new perspectives, such as postmodernism and its related postcolonialism. Research by various minority groups in the United States challenged cinepsychoanalysis even more than it had been problematized earlier by gay/lesbian scholars (e.g., Dyer 1978; Arbuthnot and Seneca 1993)[5] and by white scholars like Jane Gaines and Yvonne Rainer following the leads of postcolonialists (e.g., Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak).[6] Minority feminists such as Michele Wallace, bell hooks, and many others built out from feminist film theory and took it in new directions.[7] Finally, so-called third-world women developed critiques, furthering the issue of positionality already addressed by U.S. minority women, to which I will return below.[8]

The discursive field encompassing feminism and film grew and changed as cinepsychoanalysis was destabilized in the context of questions raised by minority, gay, and third-world women; as well as by feminist historians who challenged the relative neglect of history in the field; by scholars

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[4] See, e.g., Copjec 1994; de Lauretis 1994; Doane 2002. For an example of a more "teachable" text, see Carson, Dittmar, and Welsch 1994.

[5] In 1978 Richard Dyer's *Gays and Film* almost single-handedly started a field, while Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca's early critique of cinepsychoanalysis is often overlooked. Gay and lesbian film studies is now a burgeoning field, as reflected, for example in Patricia White's *UnInvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Respectability* (1999)

[6] See Gaines's early influential essay, "White Privilege and Looking Relations" (1988), and Rainer's 1990 film *Privilege*, which brought to the fore many issues about black/white relations among women. Work in this general area by other scholars should also be noted. See Fanon 1967; Said 1978; Spivak 1988, Bhabha 1994; Nichols 1994, Bernstein and Studlar 1997, Foster 1997a, 1997b

[7] Wallace, Manthia Diawara, hooks, and Valerie Smith brought important new perspectives to bear on film and the media more generally, inspiring many other studies of film by African American and other minority scholars. See Wallace 1990; Diawara 1991, 1993; hooks 1992; Smith 1997. In the United Kingdom, Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer (1988a, 1988b) developed minority perspectives early on.

[8] See, e.g., Trinh 1989; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Rony 1996.

urging work on issues of class and power relations; and by expanding interest in media studies (especially television), which soon drew attention to digital technologies and visual culture more generally.[9] But the new directions were also determined by yet more dramatic changes in the world outside the academy. The legacies of European imperialism moved into view in the 1990s, and postcolonial studies developed. New technologies have also caused the world to shrink. In light of this, and the emergence of many new kinds of women's movements globally, there is no monolithic feminism of the kind our language in the 1970s assumed. What we now see is a range of global feminisms further destabilizing film and media studies in general and feminist film theory in particular.

Trauma and feminist film theory

My increasing knowledge of efforts of women around the world to work against their specific oppressions in their own ways, including study of their national cinemas and women's roles in such institutions, together with my own travels over the years have inspired the new directions of my current work. Writing in 2004, I find myself in a vastly different social, political, and technological context from when I wrote both *Women and Film* (Kaplan 1983b) and *Looking for the Other* (Kaplan 1997), such as could not have been envisaged in the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s. The sudden end of the cold war altered international relations in unpredictable ways: old constructs, such as "East" versus "West" or "communism" versus "capitalism," merge into new constructions, such as the recent "Islam" versus "West." The burgeoning conflict between the Arab nations and the United States came to a sudden head with the 9/11 attacks, but even before that, it seemed that a space had been opened for European nations and the United States to deal with the devastating legacies of imperialism, slavery, and destruction of indigenous cultures and languages.

My sense is that, while multicultural film feminists may still have some interest in "gaze" theories of a certain kind (I hope they do), they are also developing numerous other approaches, depending on local conditions and needs. How far Western women can—or should—participate in this work will continue to be debated: my own choice to move on from looking at Hollywood and (largely) European women's cinema (including the avant-

[9] A number of important anthologies in these developing areas are Joyrich 1996; Brooker and Brooker 1997, and, most recently, Mirzoeff 2002 While popular books about virtual reality and cyberspace abounded in the 1990s, more scholarly and responsible books emerged a bit later, such as Sobchack 1999a.

garde) within an always questioning cinepsychoanalysis to studying multi-cultural women's films has involved theorizing a role for my own work, as I describe below. My current project includes comparative focus on women's indigenous cinema (spurred by my invitations to lecture in China, Japan, Australia, Taiwan, and Brazil from 1987 onward). In this work, I explore issues of trauma and problematize the transmission of cultural differences between women. While I continue to struggle with issues of the gaze and psychoanalysis, my focus now is less on sexual difference than on the cultural differences racialized by national discourses and historical traditions (institutions, policies, and power relations).

This new work on trauma studies and visual culture in part responds to the new era of terror, which, even if it is a U.S. construction, is having material effects globally. Given the global proliferation of media and the instant global relay of catastrophes via live television and the Internet, people across the world are daily bombarded with images of pain and suffering. The work might be said, in a way, to continue the idea behind the concept of an "interracial gaze" developed in *Looking for the Other* (Kaplan 1997) in that I am interested in how visual media dealing with traumatic situations can produce either further alienation (a negative result) or empathic understanding of suffering across cultural difference through the process of what I call "witnessing" (a possibly healing result). I focus on so-called quiet family traumas—those of loss, abandonment, rejection—across a range of situations from women in World War II to the forced separation of Aboriginal children from their parents in postcolonial Australia. I study films by and about women but deal also with written memoirs. Although psychoanalysis provides one of the most important theories of what happens in trauma, here I also look at neuroscience research on brain circuitry under stressful conditions. (The interface of psychoanalysis and brain research remains a fascinating field for further study and offers insight into how interdisciplinarity moves fields forward.) The aim of the work is ultimately to offer a model of ethical "witnessing" in select visual media and to distinguish this from the voyeurism and sensationalism of much live reporting of catastrophes.[10]

This new work is problematic in regard to my address of traumatic situations of indigenous and other women in the second part of my new book on trauma and translation (Kaplan in press). In the earlier multicultural research, I did not confront the really tough questions of my own positionality, although I had glossed those issues in an essay on "Problematizing Cross-Cultural Research on Film: The Case of China" (Kaplan

[10] See Kaplan 2002 and Kaplan and Wang 2004.

1989). In her essay, "Third World Women's Cinema: If the Subaltern Speaks, Will We Listen?" (1997a), Gwendolyn Audrey Foster elegantly summarizes the dilemmas of third-world women filmmakers and theorists inevitably placed within Western feminist critical and representational discourses. She glosses many different suggestions by non-Western and Western women about how to deal with what often seemed (and still seems) like a catch-22 situation. As Foster notes, "Approaches to decolonizing the subject positionality of the critical power relationship is by no means a simple or straightforward task" (1997b, 215). One of my strategies in this context is to see my work on indigenous film as one act of translation among many. I explore texts representing other acts of translation already underway or imagined. I distinguish three separate acts of translation: first, those undertaken by Western and indigenous artists depicting transcultural contact from postcolonial perspectives; second, those produced by indigenous peoples examining intracultural conflict and difference; and finally, the acts of those working between cultures, whom I call "embodied translators" (Kaplan 2004).

Conclusion

The introduction of new fields related to film and media studies, such as cultural studies, postmodern and postcolonial studies, and, more recently, visual culture studies, has clearly influenced the quite dramatic change in feminism and film research—my own and that of others. It soon became clear that old secure binaries of feminist film theories were solidly modernist and Western, and they began to erode. In this way, the "center" could not hold, and psychoanalytic theories and issues of the gaze began to be muted to the minor key.

But the earlier focus did not, nor should it, disappear. That psychoanalysis is far from "dead" in feminist fields, including film and media studies, is clear if we consider that conferences on psychoanalysis and the arts continue to be organized. Indeed, there is a new focus on bringing academic humanities scholars and clinicians together so that the research of each can enhance the other.[11] The new work on memory and trauma (such as that by Susannah Radstone [2000]) is also reviving debates about the need for a return to Freudian psychoanalysis and is very much central to my in press

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[11] See, e.g., "The Boundaries of Psychoanalysis," a series of interdisciplinary workshops organized by Esther Rashkin for the Association for Comparative Literature Conference, San Marcos, Calif., April 2003. See also conferences organized jointly by the Tavistock Clinic and the University of East London on Culture and the Unconscious.

book project, *Trauma and Translation: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Film, Media, and Literature* (Kaplan in press).

More than this, I do not think psychoanalysis should be sidelined. As Joan Copjec notes in the introduction to *Imagine There's No Woman*, "My arguments . . . are premised on the belief that psychoanalysis is the mother tongue of our modernity and that the important issues of our time are scarcely articulable outside the concepts it has forged" (2003, 9). Despite its being true that psychoanalytic theories are no longer central, despite my not arguing that they should be, and because of the questions raised in research by minority and third-world women, we now face the challenge of seeing to what degree psychoanalytic insights make sense for women in non-Western cultures. Working over classical feminist film theories and the reactions/resistances/corrections in compiling my recent *Feminism and Film* anthology (Kaplan 2000), I felt even more strongly than in the 1980s how important this work was not only for understanding sexual difference but as a lasting contribution to illuminating the root mechanisms of social, political, and interpersonal difference. The solid scholarly underpinning of cinepsychoanalysis reveals itself everywhere, in ways current research does not necessarily do. Scholars need to keep on returning to these roots, to study the cross-cultural relevance of psychoanalysis, and to study ways in which different cultures deal with psychic life so as to better understand the workings of the unconscious and fantasy in discrete cultures.

Finally, I do not think at all that we are "beyond the gaze" (either male or imperial) as a fact of life, even if feminist film scholars are taking up issues they deem more urgent given today's new global concerns, the proliferation of subjects with agency and stories to tell, and the prolif-eration of digital technologies. Most women, no matter where in the world, still live in heavily misogynist and racist cultures, and this fact still needs to be explained. It needs to be explained even more because many women have won the right to positions of power and are exercising that right as best they can. We have had to accommodate ourselves to the fact of male dominance, and we have retaliated by instituting our own local "gaze," by accruing certain institutional powers, or by simply ignoring what we used to call the "male gaze." We also see that many men are as powerless as we are—thus opening up what may have seemed like an anti-male position to a question of power—and how it seems more men than women are able to gain such power. The persistence of men in power and the persistence of racism suggest to me that the psychoanalytic under-pinning of male white dominance remains an issue to keep on studying. Indeed, the tendency to exclude psychoanalytic perspectives seems to me dangerous. Paradoxically, the more the unconscious is allowed free reign,

not studied, not acknowledged, the more it will control us without our "knowing."

The impact of new interdisciplinary academic programs and areas of research on feminism and film is still being examined, but clearly the reach of much work is now extremely broad in contrast to the narrow field that many of us worked in the 1980s. But I value the new challenges to film and media studies. As Antonius Robben and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco put it, "Interdisciplinary efforts interrupt the taken-for-granted practices that can bureaucratize disciplinary work. . . . By definition, interdisciplinary work subverts the reductionistic impulses common to many disciplinary enterprises" (2000, 3). In regard to the feminist movement, the fact that there is no longer a monolithic feminism is a good, if at times uncomfortable, thing. The constant contestation, questioning, and debate about positions, actions, and knowledges means that feminism is alive and well and always changing in accord with larger social, historical, and political changes in whatever nation or part of a society women live in.

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Pursuing Micromovements in Room 202

Laleen Jayamanne

A**s a contribution** to the roundtable discussion on feminism and cinema,
I present something of a "meditation" on the seminar course I offer
on feminism and film theory to fourth-year honors and graduate
students in the department of art history and theory at the University of
Sydney. It has taken me about ten years to develop this seminar, which
is in many ways the most difficult subject that I teach, although I am
ostensibly a specialist, having completed a doctorate in 1981 on the "Po-
sitions of Women in the Sri Lankan Cinema, 1947–1979." For ten years
after, I did not want to teach the subject of feminist film theory because
I felt unable to merely repeat what I had learned. Certainly, I introduced
ideas developed within feminist film theory into other courses I taught,
but I felt rather paralyzed about tackling the subject head on. Indeed, I
still feel that I have to work against a kind of feminist "common sense,"
most especially my own.

I take feminist common sense to mean received ideas that are in the
air, circulating as clichés, such as, for example, the "male gaze." When
they were in primary school, my daughter and her friends knew about
the "male gaze," and they pulled me up for pretending not to know what
they meant when they criticized what they thought was a sexist billboard.
I was rather astonished at how proper their response was. And yet we all
tend to proceed from one recognizable moment of sexism or patriarchal
determination to yet another along a familiar path that we always already
know. Elsewhere, I have written about the problem of taking on the
persona of "the knowing critic," which I think is an intellectual and li-
bidinal dead end. God knows, the video archive is full of sexist stuff, but
instead of identifying and denouncing or lamenting "the state of things"
I have chosen to examine films in my seminar that create some change,
that challenge my intellectual preconceptions.

To get myself into a proper state of mind to teach feminist film theory,

I always read the tribute that I wrote (with friends) to the memory of Claire Johnston (a pioneer in the emerging field of feminist film theory in the mid-1970s) on hearing that she had committed suicide in 1987 (Stern, Grace, and Jayamanne 1988). Although I had never met her, I thought of her as one of my intellectual mentors, and her writing was very important to me as a young scholar. Rereading our tribute to her reminds me that intellectual work may become a life-and-death matter and, less dramatically, that feminist dead ends need to be acknowledged.

So here is what I give my students by way of a brief introduction to the course:

> This seminar will provide an overview of the history of feminist film theory, criticism, and film, taking, as a point of departure, the study of the cinematic modulation of gesture and affect. The aim is to explore the powers and qualities by which film creates bodies of all sorts (both organic and nonorganic), including of course gendered bodies. This is, therefore, a course on film aesthetics with a precise focus on the study of how filmic powers and qualities are activated across a range of films (Hollywood genre cinema and independent cinema).
>
> This is also a theoretical course in a highly specialized area of the wider field of film theory and draws substantially from the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's two books of film theory, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* ([1983] 1986) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* ([1985] 1989). Students are expected to read sections of these books and other related theoretical literature from a range of disciplines (including anthropology, feminist theory, psychoanalysis, and theatrical theory, among others) and to develop a working knowledge of the major methodological concepts that inform the course: movement, time, gesture, and affect. These concepts are mobilized to explore and analyze the prescribed films. The seminar will therefore be working with concepts as methodological tools for the filmic analysis of audio/visual images.

Here I should add that, in selecting the films for the seminar, I seem to have been drawn to works in which the significant moments often occur at a microlevel. I use the term *moment* because I want students to attune themselves temporally, in terms of cinematic rhythm, and not to simply read film images spatially.

Here is a selection of the topics and films included in my course syllabus:

- Introduction: A History of Feminist Film Theory. Why Deleuzian Theory?

    The Bamboo Flute (Kumar Shahani, 1997)

    Kasba (Kumar Shahani, 1991)
- A Theory of Gendered Spectatorship: Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975)

    Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)
- Theories of the Cinematic Apparatus

    Peeping Tom (Michael Powell, 1960)
- Gesture and Time

    Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (Chantal Akerman, 1976)
- Gesture and Voice

    News from Home (Chantal Akerman, 1977)

    On Tour with Pina Bausch (Chantal Akerman, 1976)
- Gesture in Action Cinema: Organic/Nonorganic Bodies and the Impulse Image

    Thelma and Louise (Ridley Scott, 1991)

    Alien: Resurrection (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997)

    The Long Kiss Goodnight (Renny Harlin, 1996)
- On Allegory and Veiling

    The Day I Became a Woman (Marzieh Meshkini, 2000)

    Kali Salva (Fareeda Mehta, 2000)
- Deleuze's "Affection Image": Color and Close-Up

    The Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1990)

    Blue Steel (Kathryn Bigelow, 1989)
- From the Eye to the Brain: Deleuze's "Cinema as Brain"

    Eyes Wide Shut (Stanley Kubrick, 1999)

These films and the assigned readings help us to perceive and pursue movement. To pursue cinematic movement in the pursuit of a certain history of the movement of women must yield something, a thought that moves, maybe a moving thought, perchance. Not all films will yield something unexpected, something exhilarating that drives one crazy trying to work out what it is that eludes its capture by thought. So while the unofficial canon (i.e., *Vertigo* [1958]; *Peeping Tom* [1960]; *Jeanne Dielman* [1975]) is part of my course, I also try to include films that have not been considered within the terms of feminist film theory. In doing this I am aware that the terms may need revision too. This is a way of derailing intellectual habit, which stops the movement that is essential to the act of thinking. That is, I want to think of filmic images as a challenge

to thought rather than as merely an illustration that "proves" something I learned elsewhere. This is why Deleuzean film theory is essential for me. It does not tell you what to think but provides concepts that help you perceive and describe movements of different kinds. Focusing on such things as gesture, affect, and rhythm, Deleuze's cinematic concepts sensitize one to perceiving time and movement—even micromovements. The basic assumption is that plot and narrative emerge *from* the image, so we start with the image and its modulations. Gesture is not seen simply as the expression of a fully formed subject but rather as having the power to create an unknown body or to render a known one unfamiliar. All of the Deleuzean concepts mentioned above in the syllabus are methodological tools for tracking the modulation of images, and modulation, a musical and rhythmic concept, is novel in cinema studies, which has been too long under the sway of the linguistic concept of difference. This is why Deleuze's film theory is important for this course.

The two films by Kumar Shahani that opened my course last year are a case in point. Shahani is an Indian modernist filmmaker who works with syncretic Indian traditions in music, dance, painting, and sculpture and who came and gave a talk on "The Ambiguity of Becoming" to the seminar. *Kasba* (1991) has a lot to do with the problematic of gender in cinema, but unless one comes at it via the tradition in Indian painting known as the Pahari miniatures of the eighteenth century, within which Shahani composes his mise-en-scène, the film will not yield much. *Kasba*'s quite delicate synesthetic richness certainly can be heard and felt, but at an analytical level one has to explore the nature of synesthesia if one is to understand the film's composition. To do this, one has to work with ideas of color, rhythm, and movement. The central character, Tejo, who is a woman figured beyond good and evil, cannot be understood within the categories of gender alone. She is a force that destroys all that stands in the way of achieving her ambitions, and the camera stands at a nonjudgmental distance when she kills the infant who will inherit her family's fortune. The melodramatic pathos of the action is diminished by the camera's distance, but in its place we have something else elaborated through movement, gesture, and the pose, although one has to struggle to articulate this in a new and nonjudgmental way. Here, I remember Claire Johnston's haunting sentence in her suicide letter: "Some relation to eye, ear, and memory . . . has simply gone wrong, irrevocably" (Stern, Grace, and Jayamanne 1988, 127). This is why I feel that we need to recognize the mimetic power of cinema and learn this from film itself. Indeed, I have written about this extensively in my last book, *Toward Cinema and Its Double: Cross-Cultural Mimesis* (Jayamanne 2001), and

I do believe that film is a great mentor in activating mimetic modes of perception.

What does Shahani's other film, *The Bamboo Flute* (1997), have to do with feminist film theory? In this film organic sounds (the flute) and mechanical sounds (trains) fuse to produce nonorganic lines of auditory movement suggesting that the flute itself, that most simple and humble of instruments, is like the human voice—a breath blowing through a void—and is thus the most metaphysical and fragile of instruments. In class, Shahani told us that, in Indian metaphysics, the sound of the flute expresses the longing of the divine (and of eternal return) for the human (and the contingent). Indian metaphysics aside, however, I long to be able to modulate my voice a little in room 202, the Aussie classroom where I teach this seminar, so that the polemical edge will not be all: "Is that all there is, my love, is that all there is?"

Vertigo (1958) and *Peeping Tom* (1960) are films that have been vigorously debated within feminist film theory, and, by now, their examinations of voyeurism, fetishism, and masochism have yielded a number of opposed interpretations. Inclusion of these canonical films not only sparks spirited discussion but, through the readings, I am also able to emphasize how one's theoretical assumptions and methodologies produce different readings. I show Chantal Akerman's work, particularly her film on Pina Bausch, because of its power of gesture both to make and unmake bodies. Akerman also foregrounds how the work of repetition and modulation can act as a force of transformation. By looking at film in these terms, one can forge productive links between generic action films like *Blue Steel* (1989) and an "art" film about tedium and domestic work like *Jeanne Dielman* (1975) in surprising ways. The points of similarity emerge at moments when the bodies of both female protagonists move beyond their familiar and habitual coordinates of sensory motor action in ways that are not only novel but productively shocking.

Throughout the seminar, in recounting the history of feminist film theory and its major methodological breakthroughs, I present several ideas about the cinematic apparatus as developed not only by academic film theorists but also by filmmakers. For Shahani, the apparatus is an orifice because of the aperture of the camera, which lets in light, but it is noteworthy that he does not liken this orifice to a human organ such as the eye. For Raul Ruiz ([1941] 1995), the apparatus activates an interval between each photogram, which he likens to death or to a forgetting, which means that in every twenty-four frames per second there are many temporalities. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1988) spoke of filming as "writing reality with reality," which was not a semiologically naive statement. For

Robert Bresson (1977), the camera and the tape recorder were machines of divination, which is perhaps why he first interviewed his actors or models (as he preferred to think of them) over the phone. That way he could hear something that intimated to him a spiritual sign, and he would see them only if what he heard said something to him in terms of the quality of the voice itself. These philosophical spins by filmmakers on the ontology of the apparatus help us to understand the stuff of which cinema is made: movement and time, light and color, gestures and postures, textures and lines. This is Deleuze's thesis too, no doubt inspired by filmmakers as much as by Henri Bergson's ideas on movement. It seems to me that, without an interest in cinematic ontology or its mimetic nature, the intellect tends to instrumentalize the image, and we only see "gender" and "genre" and not the movements that constitute these categories. Rethought in terms of movement, cinema enables a mode of perception particularly attuned to micromovements, vibrations, modulations; it opens up for us a capacity to differentiate and temporalize movement before these are solidified into narrative blocks, or recognizable units and categories. Thus, I think a descriptive movement is essential to writing about cinema as a way of getting at stuff we tend not to notice. This is where a cinephiliac impulse is essential to any epistemophilia that also has an impulsive vitalism.

   In the middle years of my life I find myself particularly interested in unpredictable couplings and modulations that make us perceive what Deleuze calls the genesis of an "unknown body" ([1985] 1989, 201). Such bodies come into being in unpredictable ways through gestures and postures, as does Tejo in *Kasba* (1991), Ripley in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), or Geena Davis in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996). Cinema has the power to fuse the organic and the inorganic, including the mechanical, to create a nonorganic vitality—as in the marvelous image of a swarm of women riding their bicycles, their black chadors animated by the wind in *The Day I Became a Woman* (1999) or the T-Bird convertible in which Thelma and Louise glide through Monument Valley and exchange faces, transported by light, music, and then silence (and, yes, I do mean exchange faces, not looks, though this sounds like an impossibility, but check out the final scene in *Thelma and Louise* [1991]; they do exchange faces through lap dissolves into each other in extreme close-ups). These are strange couplings of forces where subjects do not remain identical to themselves and objects do not move as they should but get caught up in a cinematic force Deleuze calls the "affection image." This is an image that makes one see, feel, or hear something that is hard to conceptualize; it is the "nothing" that Louise speaks of as a way of signaling the presence

of something that is not really a thing, a sensation that does not belong to anyone, the quality of the image raised to the power of capturing the barely perceptible.

I, too, believe that this is the singular power of cinema, to make us see the imperceptible and make sonorous the inaudible durations of all sorts of bodies. My work is an effort to learn to perceive and articulate these filmic virtualities. The *actual* and the *virtual* are terms in Deleuze's philosophy and important concepts in the cinema books with which we work. The women in the Hollywood films of the 1990s analyzed in my seminar are conceptualized in terms of generic women, but what is interesting here is that, within the action, sci-fi/thriller, and road movie genres of *Blue Steel* (1989), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1990), *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996), and *Thelma and Louise* (1991), these generic women find themselves in alien territory and have to learn to occupy new spaces. This is where movement and gesture and affect and rhythm become key modulators. These films do not simply reverse the conventional terms of genre to place a woman "on top" and expect her to know how to act; instead, the woman has to learn how to be professional or to survive in generic spaces that have previously been male territory. This process of learning happens in unpredictable ways, and Deleuzean film theory helps one perceive microgestures and movements and the emergence of something new, which is the power of the affection image.

In this seminar—and enterprise—women directors do not have any particular advantage, and I study both male and female directors. Thus, I have explored the elusive reverberations that happen at the corners of perception and escape conceptualization in Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). In an article I wrote for *Senses of Cinema* (Jayamanne 2002), I tracked the intervals and the micromovements of image and speech to see where Kubrick was taking us in his late-twentieth-century recreation of a symbolist New York and the symbolist woman, Alice, incarnated by Nicole Kidman. I argued that the film offers an ornamentation of time through the use of painting, color, light, and sound and that it creates a fascination with the image, an eroticization really. Kidman/Alice performs language and gesture musically, particularly in the lengthy postparty bedroom scene, by creating intervals between words and within syllables so that you do not know where she is going, nor does she. But she keeps forking off any which way on sonic waves. Her hyperfemininity and protofeminist consciousness make her moves strangely unpredictable, now girlish, now grave, now polemical, now silly, now sad, now magnificent, in her ability to verbally articulate her erotic desire and its consequences.

Poor Tom/Bill is dumbfounded, frozen in the presence of such intensity and flexibility. Kubrick, like the symbolists, was interested in synesthesia, and one might say that his last film is an important contribution to thinking *cinesthesia* now—that is, after one hundred years of cinema and other technologies have left our eyes wide shut because they overdetermine the way we see and feel. Kubrick refuses to make money and time, money and light, money and color commensurate. There are correspondences we can draw here with Shahani's *Kasba* (1991) in terms of the use of paintings as a metamorphic force that aids the female protagonists in their metamorphoses. The whole thrust of my analysis is to perceive the implications of the micromovements of gesture, light, color, and speech.

In the fewer than ten years left to me in room 202 before I retire, I expect to become imperceptible to myself and through this to become inaudible even—oh, not to hear my voice echo in my ear, returning more of the same! So let me end with an audio/visual particle from *The Bamboo Flute* (1997) by way of striking a lighter note. A youthful male wearing a turban plays a flute in a close-shot that in a while becomes a two-shot of a woman singing alongside him, a middle-aged peasant woman, her face weathered and marked by time, wearing ornaments on her ears and around her neck. The close-shot shows micromovements of her facial musculature in the effort it takes to respond to the flute mimetically. This duet between this odd couple, amplified by the woman's hand gestures called forth by her voice, moves me most when the close-shot becomes a long-shot showing an open-cut coal stripmine on which they stand and sing and play the flute: the couple playing in a scarred landscape, listening to the sounds of each other's breath.

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Marlene, Dolls, and Fetishism

Judith Mayne

Twenty years ago I wrote a review essay for *Signs* on feminist film theory and criticism (Mayne 1985). At the time, feminist film theorists and critics were frustrated by the way in which *Signs*—already the premier academic journal of feminist studies—had seemingly ignored feminist work on film. This may have been a paranoid observation, but it also may have been an accurate reflection of the peculiar status that feminist film theory occupied vis-à-vis both feminist studies and film studies in general. Indeed, in its emerging years in the 1970s and early 1980s, feminist film theory was more connected to film theory than it was to feminist studies. Some might argue that this was due to a historical and/or sociological emphasis in feminist research of the time, although the emergence of massive amounts of work in feminist literary theory and criticism would seem to belie that claim. The standard claim, of course, is that feminist film theory departed from other fields of feminist inquiry in its affiliation—some would call it productive, others would call it oppressive—with psychoanalysis.

And so, in that essay, I felt an obligation to account for what was seen as simultaneously the unique contribution of feminist film theory and the source of its most problematic and troublesome assumptions—the reliance on psychoanalysis. What often gets forgotten, especially in the kinds of binaristic (e.g., theory/history) or heroic (e.g., the errors of the past/the clarity of the present) histories that tend to be produced to account for the development of feminist film studies (or any other field), is that psychoanalysis was discussed contentiously in the 1970s and 1980s and that its influence was far more complex than a simple matter of allegiance. For psychoanalysis was connected to many of the most engaging insights (and, yes, many of the silly ones as well) that emerged in contemporary film theory. Yet at the same time psychoanalytic theory of the period was the equivalent of theory itself, so any failure or reluctance to "do" psychoanalysis was perceived as a resistance to theory itself.

Old habits die hard: when I am asked to reflect on the current state of feminist film studies in relationship to the past, I immediately think of

psychoanalysis, even though I have never considered myself a psychoanalytic critic and my relationship to the feminist film tradition shaped by psychoanalysis was always somewhat distanced. I believe that part of the reason for this is, as I said, habit; I am used to "classic" feminist film theory being described purely in psychoanalytic terms. But I also believe that *psychoanalysis* came to stand in for a number of other considerations that had less to do with a master method than it did with a particular kind of attention to how we read, how we watch, and, of course, how we see. Studies of the "gaze" (especially the "male gaze") and the oedipal configurations of classical Hollywood cinema may well be passé. But alongside those clichés of psychoanalytic feminism were other preoccupations having to do with the materiality of film, with the pleasure of slowing down projection, with the study of the components of the shot, the sequence, and the scene. Textual analysis was the methodology most often associated with film theory in the 1970s, but I am not sure it has weathered well through the years. Some of the claims of psychoanalytically informed textual analysis were specious—especially the assumption that a spectator's desire can be charted like a map through the film text. The basic assumption of textual analysis—that texts are structured both by binary oppositions and by what exceeds or problematizes or escapes them—has been appropriated and adapted into many different forms that bear few traces of the psychoanalytic influence, from notions of resistant readings to symptomatic analyses that trace how films (and other visual/narrative forms) manage, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, to engage with cultural anxieties. Perhaps this is the nature of critical vocabulary—the term *deconstruction*, to take an obvious example, is now used virtually interchangeably with *critique*. But perhaps *psychoanalysis*, in its conjunction with textual analysis, stood for something else, for an attempt to understand form and structure and their contradictions and failures as connected to desire, obviously, but also and especially to what is and is not visible at a particular moment.

These comments are prompted by one of my current research projects, on the iconic status of Marlene Dietrich. As those familiar with feminist film theory know, Dietrich has served not only as an example but also as a paradigm for virtually every feminist argument that has been made about the classical cinema. In Laura Mulvey's account, Josef von Sternberg's films with Dietrich embodied fetishism, the woman as lack, the woman as projection of male desires (Mulvey 1975). For Gaylyn Studlar, the von Sternberg-Dietrich collaboration represented the possibility of another kind of viewing pleasure, that of the masochistic aesthetic, based on fusion with the mother rather than punishing distance from her (Studlar 1988).

Dietrich figures just as forcefully in the critiques of "classical" feminist film theory as she did in the foundational work that preceded them. Dietrich was proposed, in feminist psychoanalytic accounts of the cinema, as the model of the fetishization of the woman, the representation of (male) lack and fear of castration, the woman rendered desirable yet inaccessible through her demeanor and especially through framing and costumes, from veils to feathers. Yet she also emerged as a point of resistance to those claims of heteronormativity and passivity—Dietrich returned the look, mocked the male gaze, offered herself as the embodiment of plural desires. Thus Dietrich has served to theorize both the paradigmatic workings of the cinema in patriarchal terms and exceptions, excesses, and resistances to such conventions.

Classical feminist film theory has been criticized for its inattention to matters of race, and Dietrich—in particular the Dietrich of *Blonde Venus* (1932)—has served as a reminder of the extent to which gender and race are intersecting categories in the classical cinema (Snead 1994, 69–75; Gubar 1997, 221–23; Petro 2002, 136–56). Feminist film theory has also been criticized for its elision of lesbian pleasures in the cinema, and Dietrich once again has been a central figure for understanding how the presumed heteronormativity of classical cinema is far less fixed or monolithic than is usually assumed to be the case (Weiss 1993, 30–35, 42–48; Desjardins 1995; White 1999, 49–57). Indeed, that Dietrich's first American film, *Morocco* (1930), features, very early in the film, her star turn as a cabaret singer in top hat and tails who kisses a female member of the audience suggests that lesbian desire was foundational in Dietrich's appeal.

Dietrich remains an icon in these more recent explorations, but one shaped by different explanatory narratives—of lesbian history, say, or of the production of whiteness. Such a range of possibilities contained within the Dietrich persona may well be the perfect embodiment of the contradictory qualities of stardom, identified in Richard Dyer's groundbreaking (1979) work as essential to the dynamics of the performer/spectator relationship. Contradiction may figure in a particularly strong way vis-à-vis stardom, but it also has been one of the enduring preoccupations of feminist film studies. In my review essay for *Signs*, I may have felt obligated to address psychoanalytic work, but the real pleasure of writing that essay was the opportunity to address how contradiction has been such a central force and productive tension in feminist film work. In the 1970s and 1980s, the central contradiction may well have turned on what now seems a somewhat quaint and/or outdated notion: How and why do women take pleasure in a form—the ubiquitous classical Hollywood cinema—that appears to deny the very possibility of such pleasure except in the most

patriarchally defined terms? The terms may change, but the question of contradiction—and the ways in which textual analysis engages with it, not as a formalist method but as, precisely, a mode of reading attentive to moments of tension—seems to be an ongoing challenge.

The particular contradiction that I find the most challenging in relationship to Dietrich is that this icon of sophistication and glamour was the proud owner of a black doll, which she called her "mascot" and carried with her everywhere during her career. The black doll figures prominently in the memoir/biography written by Dietrich's daughter, Maria Riva (1992). Riva describes how, during the filming of *The Blue Angel* (1929), Marlene came home in a fury one day, desperately digging through trunks and accusing little Maria of having stolen her doll. Maria knew that her father, Rudolf Sieber, had been fixing the grass skirt of the doll; the father is thus identified as both maternal and as the devoted handmaiden to his wife's desires. Once the doll is found, Riva tells us that her mother hurriedly dropped off her daughter (who was not allowed on the set of the film), "her black doll clutched securely under her arm. Wherever Dietrich went, her black savage was sure to go. He was her good-luck charm throughout her life—her professional one" (73). For Dietrich's daughter, the black doll is associated with the launching of her mother's career and in particular with the separation between mother and daughter; the doll is carefully packed when Marlene goes to Hollywood, and Maria describes her timidity in asking her mother if her "savage" made an appearance in *Morocco*, Dietrich's first Hollywood film.

Indeed, attentive viewers might well recognize the doll from Dietrich's films as well as from publicity postcards of the actress, often in the company of yet another one of Dietrich's dolls, a so-called Chinese coolie doll, made by Lenci. The coolie doll was an artist's doll designed for adult consumption, and it was given to Dietrich in 1930 by Josef von Sternberg when *The Blue Angel*—their most famous collaboration as director and star—made Dietrich an international phenomenon. Von Sternberg supposedly wanted Marlene's black "mascot" to have a companion, and the two dolls traveled with Dietrich throughout her career. Together, the two dolls have a significant presence in *Morocco* (1930), and they appear briefly in *Dishonored* (1931).

The black doll appears in *The Blue Angel*. As is well known, this film is the founding myth of the Dietrich persona: Dietrich plays seductive cabaret performer Lola Lola, with whom a stodgy professor falls madly and hopelessly in love, leading to his humiliation and downfall. Marlene's "mascot" plays a small but significant role in the creation of this myth.

In the film, the black doll appears the morning after stuffy Professor
Emmanuel Rath has, for the first time, spent the night with Lola Lola,
with whom he has become infatuated after discovering that his young
male students are far more interested in her charms than in his classroom.
What began, then, as a presumed investigation on the part of Rath into
the seedy "Blue Angel" club and the overt sexiness of Lola Lola becomes
a very exaggerated walk on the wild side for the professor, as he falls in
love with Lola and eventually marries her.

This "morning after" scene shows us Rath in Lola's bed, fully clothed,
asleep, holding this doll of unspecified gender. As Rath awakens, he seems
somewhat disoriented, and he looks at the doll with a combination of
awe and curiosity. For a few brief moments, Rath plays with the doll, then
looks for his glasses and puts them on to inspect the doll more closely.
We do not see Rath in bed with the woman but rather with her doll. Rath
himself seems childlike, gazing with curiosity at the doll and amusing
himself with the mechanism of the music box inside it. Then, as if suddenly
bored, he tosses the doll aside. Lola calls to him, and he joins her for
breakfast.

By foregrounding Rath and the doll, the scene simultaneously suggests
and displaces the scene of sexuality. The doll may be a substitute for the
woman, literally replacing her in the bed, but the doll is also a projection
of the man's childlike demeanor. And the doll's blackness projects a ste-
reotypical image of what a "native African" was imagined to be—childlike
yet oddly sexual, and thus a reflection of stereotypes of the primitive that
were popular in Europe in the 1920s. However unusual a detail the doll
might appear to be, in other words, it is certainly possible that its ap-
pearance is not so surprising in a film that trades in many of the features
of modernity—the preoccupation with a woman's sexuality as a lethal
force, the citation of a heterogeneous cluster of signifiers of exoticism,
and the commodification of otherness. Like so many other artists of the
1920s and 1930s, von Sternberg suggests a connection between the so-
called primitive and female sexuality.

The doll may be a familiar evocation of a modern European world
preoccupied with primitivism and female sexuality, but it remains a strange
object within the world of the film. It is associated with Lola, but never
does she hold the doll; rather, its limited appearances are always in the
context of the changing dimensions of Lola and Rath's relationship. Aside
from this "morning after" scene, the doll rarely appears in the remainder
of the film. One could argue, of course, that Rath himself has become a
doll-like figure, an automaton, a childlike replica of himself who has buried

his illusions and turned into a mockery of himself. Thus the doll is quite akin to the clown, the cherubs, the cabaret figures, all of which seem to function as observers, as markers of Rath's downfall.

If we see the doll only as a reflection of or witness to Rath's decline, the question of race is left unaddressed, and sexuality is defined purely in terms of the evil female force that overpowers Rath. The little black doll stands out as one of those stubborn details that is central to the film—the image of Rath holding the doll was a popular publicity item from the film—but that is somewhat resistant to commentary (literally—even given how much has been said about this film and about Dietrich, the doll is rarely mentioned). The doll is associated with Lola—it *is* Lola; it simultaneously evokes and displaces her sexuality. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? It is perhaps easy (too easy) to see the doll in *The Blue Angel* as a classic fetish: it stands in for the woman; it covers over her lack, while offering for visual display the process of fetishization itself and thus the attendant presumed position of superiority for the presumed male spectator.

There are two obvious problems here, and both of them are connected to critiques of "classic" feminist film theory that have inspired much contemporary work. First, any racial specificity of the doll is subsumed under a fairly narrow notion of sexuality, and, second, the woman's active part—on- or offscreen—in the fetishizing scenario is denied. Women's presumed inability to fetishize has been one of many assumptions to undergo drastic revision in the last decade or so. Fetishism, understood now more as the ambivalence of the ironist (following Naomi Schor [1985, 1995]) than the dread of the phallocrat, is, if not celebrated, then at the very least explored as offering an understanding of multiple identifications and positions. However, a celebration—or exploration—of female fetishism that leaves all but a very narrow conception of sexuality, not to mention race, out of the picture risks affirming only the (unexamined, because unproblematized) fetishism of white women within a heterosexual binary.

Here I find Dietrich's relationship with her dolls a far more provocative example of the woman's ability to fetishize, for the racial dynamics of Dietrich's relationship with her dolls foreclose any simple celebration of fetishism as necessarily subversive. Dietrich's relationship with her dolls also foregrounds in a more complex way than the "return of the look" the question of female agency in relationship to stardom. Before Dietrich and von Sternberg worked together on *The Blue Angel*, the black doll had already appeared in a 1929 film, *I Kiss Your Hand, Madame*, as a kind of silent observer to a scene of romantic reconciliation. And according to Riva's account, the appearance of the doll in *The Blue Angel* was Dietrich's inspiration. I do not want to substitute Dietrich-auteur for von

Sternberg in a simple inversion of the standard male director/female performer relationship. Yet when we read the formulation of Dietrich's persona through her staging of a relationship with the dolls, we see an active creator in her own right. While participating in white male fantasies of female sexuality and primitivism, Dietrich also staged the props of those fantasies and so is located in a kind of liminal space between commodification and creative mise-en-scène.

The study of Marlene Dietrich's relationship with her dolls has taken me into some new research territory—the doll as a female collectible, for instance (with attendant implications for female spectatorship); the circulation of dolls in both Europe and the United States (with drastically different reception contexts when the black doll appears in U.S. films, thus engaging with the history of black collectibles); the very nature of doll collecting. In terms of film analysis, my interest in the doll takes me into those details of the individual film that function in often peculiar and unexpected ways, and in that process of textual analysis I find that the psychoanalytic focus of classical feminist film theory is limited by certain assumptions, yet enormously productive in the questions it raises.

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Why I Did Not Want to Write This Essay

Linda Williams

When I was asked to contribute to this roundtable my first impulse was to duck. Film feminisms are no longer the highest priority of my scholarship. Writing about a field that had once felt very exciting—that had uncovered galvanizing new perspectives on life, on moving images, on the dynamics of "looking relations"—was, in the case of this essay "assignment," beginning to feel like an unwanted duty. Often I have the same experience teaching film theory in graduate seminars. I find I have more enthusiasm for Hugo Münsterberg than for Laura Mulvey. Where I once felt part of an exciting movement and vibrant intellectual context, I now feel weighed down by the burdens of what feels like orthodox feminist position taking. Looking at my writing over the last ten years, I also find a similar reluctance. I have not written a single thing with the word *feminist* in the title. Pressed by the editors of this volume to say *something*, I have decided to examine briefly what might be behind this personal backlash.

I begin by examining some examples of recent apostasy from feminist film scholarship. The first can be found in a volume I edited not long ago with a former colleague, feminist film theorist Christine Gledhill, *Reinventing Film Studies* (Gledhill and Williams 2000). This volume was aimed at reassessing and "reinventing" the field of film studies in the wake of new technological, social, and cultural changes—the rise of global multimedia, the challenges of new historicism, the rise of postmodernist self-fashioning. One field we did *not* seek to reinvent was feminist film or media theory and criticism. In our concerted effort to "distill key issues and problems of the contemporary field that are . . . 'really useful' for the future" (2000, 1), we isolated the "massness" of cinema, the importance of film as a sensory as well as a meaning-producing medium, its existence as an alternative public sphere, history and the postmodern, and globalized multimedia. Why did we not see fit to include a single essay, let alone a separate section, on feminist approaches to film and media studies? The obvious answer, and one that will doubtless be repeated frequently throughout this roundtable, is that feminist approaches have been so folded into the basic questioning of the field of film and media studies that it would be counterproductive to isolate them into a separate section.

Feminism has indeed become part of the normal functioning of film and media studies. Gledhill's own essay on genre in the volume is an exemplary instance: "Rethinking Genre" (2000) includes a nuanced analysis of the way the signs of masculinity become associated, over time, with realism and the way femininity becomes associated with melodrama. My own essay about *Psycho* (1960) is also about gender. However, I use the occasion of "Discipline and Fun: *Psycho* and Postmodern Cinema" (Williams 2000) to challenge some of the more naive assumptions of one of my earliest feminist film essays, "When the Woman Looks" (Williams 1984). Rather than assert, as I had in this early essay, that women hide their eyes and cover their faces for reasons of sheer self-protection against the horrors of the attacks on their like, in "Discipline and Fun" I attempted to examine the differently gendered performances of fear exhibited by men and women in the audience. I took issue, in other words, with the single-minded feminism that could only see pain in the shrinking gesture of women viewers at the sight of threatening monsters or knife-wielding Norman Bateses and could not see what was clearly visible on the face of one woman spectator photographed watching *Psycho*: the fun of performing fear.

In addition to my own previous feminist response, I took issue with a number of other received opinions about this much-discussed film. For

example, I argued with David Bordwell's claim that, despite moments of deviance, *Psycho* exemplifies a certain kind of "classical" Hollywood cinema in its adherence to basic norms of Hollywood narrative (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985). I also questioned Kaja Silverman's contrary claim that the film ruptures the classical "system of suture" whereby coherent forms of meaning and unified subject positions are upheld by structures of editing and shifting points of view (Silverman 1983). I argued instead the importance of the exhilarating roller-coaster ride and "fun" generated by the film, eschewing feminist approaches that could only read pain and victimization on the faces of women viewers. Thus, I wrote: "One reason so much academic film criticism has passed over the question of the film's fun has to do with psychoanalytic and feminist paradigms aligned with what David Rodowick has called the discourse of political modernism in which the notion of an endlessly deferred, unsatisfiable *desire* was central and the notion of visual pleasure (let alone 'fun') was anathema. Within these paradigms, *Psycho*'s modernism could only be understood as a rupture with 'readerly' and 'classical' forms of visual pleasure" (Williams 2000, 353). I was restless, in other words, not only with the inheritance of paradigms of psychoanalytic and feminist theory but with the tendency either to exalt the reach and importance of the "classical" (as in Bordwell) or with the contrary tendency to exalt moments of subversion and rupture (as in Silverman). Using *Psycho* as a case study, I wanted to find a better model for appreciating the gendered fun of the film, and this model was not to be found in the academic feminist theory I and my colleagues had espoused in the late seventies and eighties.

The model I preferred was still feminist in its interest in differently gendered responses to the film and even vaguely psychoanalytic in its attentions to masochistic and sadistic alternations. However, it was emphatically opposed to ahistorical psychoanalytic paradigms of spectatorship. Instead, I wished to mark the precise historical moment—here 1960—in which real audiences were beginning to be disciplined to wait patiently in line to see a movie and then, inside the theater, were encouraged to perform gender-inflected responses of fear. I concluded that this discipline of first waiting patiently and then performing wildly gendered expressions of fear (with women hiding eyes and tense-jawed men clutching ties) represented a new level of gender play and destabilization that I take as an important instance of a postmodern, "postclassical" reception of cinema. Feminist media scholarship and theory was thus not the main point of this essay. Indeed, it was the revision of this scholarship away from its initial feminist impulse to deplore the misogyny of Hitchcockian injunctions to "torture the women!" and toward a more relaxed

understanding of gendered fun that motivated me. This, I think, is as it should be. Feminist scholarship—that is, scholarship with the primary goal of being *for* women—can no longer stand alone. It should not be the only optic through which we view moving images. If it is, we stagnate. It was a perfectly exciting, new, and galvanizing optic to some of us in the seventies, as were semiotics and psychoanalysis. While I have no objection to now teaching the history of the formation of this direction of film scholarship, we should not expect it to be vital the way it once was. Nor should we berate ourselves if we fail to renew this vitality.

Contrary to what Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane have claimed, you cannot "renew a sense of vitality" (1989, 16) if a field has ceased to be vital in the same way it once was. Vitality and a *sense* of vitality are not the same thing. Feminist film and media scholarship must now compete with a wide number of other theories, other methods, other objects of study, some of which now seem more vital, more pressing. In an introduction to my 1994 anthology of film theory and criticism, *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, I noted that film historian Tom Gunning's description of an early "cinema of attractions" (1986, 1989) had begun to vie with Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" (1975) as a popular concept. My explanation for the popularity of Gunning's concept was that, in addition to being an apt description of early cinema that did not center around narrative, it also described important aspects of *all* cinema that have been undervalued or vilified in the paradigm of "gaze theory": "The reason, I suspect, relates not only to the undeniable importance and relevance of this concept to the attractions of early cinema . . . but also to its ability to point to aspects of spectatorial relations that have been ignored under the dominance of the gaze paradigm and that are perfectly applicable to all forms of spectatorship, not only those early sensations. Gunning's notions of *attraction* and *astonishment* have caught on, in other words, because, in addition to being apt descriptions of early cinema, they describe aspects of all cinema that have also been undervalued in the classical paradigm" (Williams 1994, 11–12). In other words, the paradigm of classical cinema did not include some of the basic appeals to the body of the spectator included in the notions of attraction and astonishment.

In her recent book, *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History* (2002), Patrice Petro, a colleague I much admire, has accused me of turning away in this thinking from an important feminist tradition toward one that has no feminist component at all. Petro grants me my reasons for wishing to revise theories of looking in relation to bodily sensation, but she objects:

> I could only think, when exactly did seventies film theory become "gaze theory" and when did Mulvey's critique of classical narrative come to represent this "classical" (as opposed to "contemporary") tradition? . . . To say that concepts of attractions and astonishment have begun to vie with notions of classical narrative and the gaze is not simply to cast film theory as a contest or game of one-upmanship. More importantly it is to miss the way the discourse of thrills and attractions says as much about spectatorship as it does about our own uneasiness, less with the conditions that gave rise to Mulvey's analysis, than with the boredom and repetition of an earlier feminist model. (2002, 170–71)

Petro usefully goes on to argue the deeper connections between "gaze theory" and theories of "attractions" or thrills, but she clearly regrets that Gunning's concept says nothing about the way the female body often functions as the main attraction in the cinema of attractions (2002, 171). This, however, is at least partly my point. It *had* become boring and repetitious to see all the sensationalism of cinema motivated by castration anxiety. Women's bodies are not always the root of spectacle in moving images. *Attractions* has caught on (and I agree that it has caught on too much, becoming a catchword that explains less the more it is used). Nevertheless, because the idea of attractions does not see sexual difference as the motive for cinematic spectacularization, whether in voyeurism or fetishization, it can help us describe spectacular aspects of all cinema, early, avant-garde, "late," as well as the more "motivated" attractions of the so-called classical. If it has become a key critical term with the same sort of valence and immediate recognition (and overuse and simplification) that *the male gaze* once had, it is because historians have legitimately not wanted to subsume all attractions under the rubric, and the psychoanalytic logic, of "sexual difference." It is therefore instructive to trace the popularity of these concepts not because film study should be a popularity contest of faddish terms but because they are parallel yet different ways of grasping the "visual pleasures" of moving images. This does not mean that we must abandon the concept of the spectacle of sexual difference, only that there was a genuine need for diverse ways of understanding the spectacular, and ways that did not necessarily require immersion in the writings of Jacques Lacan.

It might help in this discussion to recall that the visual pleasure of the male gaze is something that Mulvey wished to destroy, while the attractions of early cinema are pleasures that Gunning wishes to appreciate historically. Both concepts strike an attitude toward the dominance of the

so-called classical cinema, and it is the murkiness of that concept, I argue, that became a major impediment to much film scholarship. Mulvey gives us a feminist psychoanalytic reason to object to the weakly narrativized fetishizations and strongly narrativized voyeurisms that master the female body in the "classical" mainstream. Everything that "ruptures" this gaze becomes good. Gunning, on the other hand, gives us historical reasons to value the persistence of (some of these very same) attractions in that mainstream. He views them as pleasures that preexist and underlie narrative cinema and that inhabit avant-garde cinema's relative refusal of narrative. At issue in both these approaches is the status of the "classical." For Mulvey it is all about staging the mastery of the woman; for Gunning it is all about taming raw attractions. Neither, it seems to me, quite gets at the enormous appeal of a mainstream that we might do better not to describe as "classical."

My recent work on race melodrama, like my previously discussed essay · on *Psycho,* is all about seeking new ways to understand popular cinematic, and moving-image, forms without assuming the "dominance" or even the existence of a "classical" cinema. In *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Williams 2001) as well as in other work, I have tried to argue for the great importance and centrality of spectacular modes (such as melodrama) and spectacular genres (such as pornography) that have often been regarded as marginal in film study. In both cases I have resisted some of the more predictable gendered reactions to both, especially the assumption that melodrama is an inherently feminine form designed for women and that pornography is an inherently masculine form designed for men. While initially useful, neither of these views is adequate or productive of deeper understandings of these forms. Indeed, conventional attitudes toward both have contributed to my own sense of distance from orthodox feminist film and media study.

Melodrama, for example, is not just for women. I have argued (Williams 2001) that it is neither excessively emotional nor an exclusively female form (as in the body of criticism devoted to so-called women's films, to which I once contributed). Rather it is the best example of American culture's ongoing effort to construct itself (as in our current posture in the world community post-9/11) as the special locus of wronged innocence and virtue. If at times the moralizing quest to reveal our virtue has been allied with a feminizing melodrama it is because sensationalisms of suffering have been too rigorously separated from related sensationalisms of action. We recognize pathos as feminine, action as masculine. However, it is the dialectic between them that marks the form of melodrama. Mulvey divided spectacle (passive female object) and action (active male subject)

rigidly along gender lines. My own focus observes the heritage of these gender binaries but is more interested in the interactions of a feminized pathos and a masculinized action regardless of which gender occupies which position. And this dialectic between pathos and action is basic, I argue, to the American melodramatic mode. Nor are the sensational, affective, destabilizing, spectacular, haptic, exciting, and moralizing dimensions of cinema a deviation from more "classical" norms; they are the very essence of popular American culture, and they are the way our moving-image culture continues to deal with the conflicts of gender, race, and class (Williams 2001).

In a similar vein, I have recently argued that pornography, far from being marginal and deviant and only for men, is now America's most popular and enduring genre (Williams 2004). It is a genre that has gone from exclusive consumption by men to provoking a wary interest in women and enthusiasm among many minority sexualities. While feminist approaches to pornography have deeply informed, and in many ways determined, the terms of its study, antipornography feminism has deemed anything but fierce opposition to pornography's very existence anathema. The bitter history of the sex wars within feminism has led to an extreme polarization about this topic. While I used to teach and research pornography through these feminist debates, I have learned over the years that they are less and less productive ways to enter into a serious engagement with the genre's history, form, and analysis. To look at pornography through only a feminist lens is to be stuck within a limited male/female power binary that cannot encompass the varieties of pornography, some of which are not even importantly about gender. Once again, while a certain heterosexual feminism served as my initial point of entry into a topic, now it is only by adding other perspectives—gay, lesbian, queer, race—to an initial feminist interest that I have been able to move forward in this research. In many cases, then, what began for me as a feminist issue has inevitably developed beyond these confines. Melodrama is not just a woman's form. Pornography is not just a woman's issue. Feminism informs but cannot encompass the study of either.

So, yes, to answer the questions posed by the editors, after more than twenty-five years "film feminisms" have indeed become a more heterogeneous, dynamic, and contested set of concepts and practices. Furthermore, I am not nostalgic about many of the paradigms of seventies feminist film theory and criticism that now seem less than productive for understanding what I want to learn from the history of moving-image culture. Over the years these paradigms have necessarily and inevitably lost some of the high drama of their original challenge to a singular and perhaps

too clearly identifiable patriarchal villain. My apostasies may be a function of where I sit as a scholar of the two popular media forms that have seemed to be either the most feminine (melodrama) or the most masculine (pornography). To the extent that my scholarship has been opposed to the received opinions about both these forms I have resisted what often seems to me to be a moralizing feminism. I do not believe that this means I am a "postfeminist." I reject this very concept if it is taken to mean that the goals of feminism are either irrelevant or somehow already achieved. While I understand the political and social realities that have led some women to claim to be beyond feminism, for me it will always be the crucial foundation to whatever work I do in film and media.

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Reflections on Feminist Film Studies, Early and Late

Patrice Petro

There are many issues that I would like to discuss in this brief reflection on feminist film studies. As a feminist film scholar and twenty-year veteran of higher education, and now as director of a large and expansive Center for International Education, I have found that there is indeed much to say. Has feminist theory been absorbed into or diffused by broader theories of gender or history or globalization? What is the role of feminist film theory in understanding our media and world today? Are feminist film studies still relevant to our understanding of twenty-first-century life? How so and in what way?

I recently attempted to address these questions in a presentation at the 2003 Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference workshop dedicated to "Historical Film Feminism."[1] The title of this session was in some respects unfortunate but also productive and revealing. While it was meant to signal a growing interest in early cinema among feminist scholars, it also implied, however unwittingly, that film feminism was somehow historical or of the past or now over. In the course of the presentations, however, it became clear that what had been relegated to the past was feminist film *theory*, now dismissed by some as a one-dimensional orthodoxy (by way of the shorthand "seventies film theory" or "gaze theory" or by referring to psychoanalysis, semiotics, and the ideological analyses that derived from these schools of thought).

Neither I nor other scholars on the panel were convinced that the rejection of feminist film theory was in the interest of feminist scholarship

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[1] Untitled presentation, 2003 Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference, Minneapolis, March 8.

or that, feminism aside, it was in the interest of a complex or nuanced understanding of the past. After all, given all the recent excitement about rediscovering "women film pioneers" in the early film industry, why would feminist scholars today want to bury or reject the pioneers of the recent theoretical past? What of those feminist film theorists who wrote about difference and desire and the gaze and lack—and who made possible the very field of feminist film history and critical approaches to early cinema that put gender, sexuality, and race at the forefront of the historical agenda?

With this in mind, the question I posed to the panel and to the audience was this: Why have feminist film scholars now turned their attention to early cinema, whereas an earlier generation (of the 1970s and 1980s) focused on later, so-called classical Hollywood cinema and particularly on U.S. cinema of the 1940s and 1950s? It seemed to me that the answer was by turns self-evident and complex. Feminist film theorists in the seventies and eighties focused on the so-called classical Hollywood cinema because they believed that this cinema was dominant worldwide, implicated in the ideologies and practices that supported imperialism, genocide, and the Vietnam War. It was a representational system that had produced and sustained racism and sexism, and the seeming naturalness of its narrative conventions and visual codes made it appear resistant to analysis. Feminist film theory aimed to forge a critical understanding of texts, codes, and conventions of sexual difference and saw this project as central to film theory, not restricted in its consequences to a feminist subsection of film studies. They argued with and often against a theoretical approach that was semiotic and psychoanalytic but hardly, or not necessarily, feminist at all.

Why then have feminist scholars who experienced feminist film theory belatedly chosen to focus their attention on early cinema? What is the imperative today for understanding its codes and conventions and place within an international, indeed globalized, media system?

There are obvious and compelling answers. Feminist work on early cinema is an act of historical recovery and retrieval, an effort to explore and render visible the work of women in an international film industry during the early part of the twentieth century. As Jennifer Bean points out in her introduction to the collection of essays she coedited on early cinema:

> We are witnessing an era fueled by the energies of a feminist film archaeological project that has only just begun to explore the array of prints previously assumed lost and the cultural documents previously understood as forgotten. It is an age of discovery in which the

inaugural phases of cinematic novelty and narrative development—a period predating the consolidated monopoly of the major Hollywood studios, the rise of technicians' unions restricted to men, and the fiscal quandaries associated with the coming of sound—increasingly appear as rich terrain for assessing women's participation in the aesthetic, industrial, and cultural shape of the cinema. (2002, 2)

If feminist film theory in the 1970s and 1980s was explicitly political and polemical, it seems fair to say that feminist film history today appears more academic and archival in objective and aim. But what is gained and what is lost in this shift in focus—beyond the obvious move from a critique of cinema to an affirmation of its heterogeneity? If film studies and feminist theory teach us anything, it is the imperative of critical reflection. So why has early cinema emerged (or reemerged?) as the site for explicitly feminist work?

Feminist historians would certainly claim that early cinema affords insights into our own global media culture, that the early years of the twentieth century are remarkably prescient of our own modernity, and that the focus on women as producers, consumers, and historical agents allows for a more complex and expansive understanding of where we have been and where we are today. For all the revisionary impulses, I am nonetheless struck by the conceptual categories that frame discussions in feminist film studies, whether "early" or "late." To begin with, I am troubled by the teleological historical narrative implied in the comparison of media practices in the early and late twentieth centuries. Although our own time—marked by the end of the cold war, the electronic media revolution, and the restructuring of global capital—certainly bears comparison with the development of international media economy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it would be a mistake to assume that what came in between (worldwide depression, world war, decolonization) was merely a break with a more general or inevitable political, economic, or cultural expansion. Historical breaks or ruptures are certainly compelling as rhetoric, but they are far less persuasive in charting the intractable problems and slow-moving transitions that have been with us for decades, and this is true as much, or perhaps even more, for women as for our histories of film and media.

Thus, I have been uncomfortable and unconvinced by the "early" and "late" cinema labels for our understanding of film history and the status of women within global media practices. For example, Weimar cinema can either be construed as "late" early cinema or "early" late cinema depending on the argument or point of view. (It is either the last gasp of

a modernist/mass-cultural experimental cinema—an instance of what is now called "vernacular modernism"—or an early example of classically conventional narrative and visual codes, when in fact it is both.) Needless to say, as someone drawn to texts and ideas outside of conventional categories, I believe I must reflect on my own work and explain the reasons why I believe we need to transcend "early" and "late" designations as well as the oppositions separating feminist film theory from feminist film history.

I was drawn to the study of Weimar Germany because Weimar culture sustained an intense exploration of media, politics, and cultural identity across both popular and philosophical texts and practices. The Weimar Republic was the place—an in-between and interim space between world wars, economic upheaval, and the aftermath of massive national trauma— where artists and intellectuals came to terms with the multiple meanings and experiences of modernity. Writing on Weimar culture in the 1980s, I saw this historical period as central to testing and refining the claims of feminist film theory against actual practices (see Petro 1989). Archival documents—popular illustrated magazines, censors' reports, and little-known films—allowed me to refine the compelling abstractions of feminist theory (regarding spectatorship, audiences, modernism, and popular culture) and to give them shape, particularity, and materiality. Certainly my work was an act of retrieval and reinvention. It was also explicitly polemical and political. And there can be no doubt that it was academic in focus. Like feminist film theorists of the 1970s and 1980s, I was committed to exploring representational practices with a critical eye and to retrieving a moment in history that was itself critical of claims to naturalness and verisimilitude. And like feminist scholars of early cinema, I was drawn to the study of Weimar culture because it illuminated our own modernity. More than this, it illuminated our modernity beyond convenient and simplistic binaries (high/low, early/late, male/female, mass culture/modernism, preclassical/classical) with an edge, an attitude, and a sophistication rarely seen in popular culture in the past or today. As one critic puts it, Weimar culture "experienced the pain of modernization more violently and expressed its disillusionment more coldly and more sharply than the present ever could do" (Sloterdijk [1983] 1987, 7–8).

Hence, through its cinema and via the writing of its intellectuals who pondered the impact of media and technology on subjective experience, I was drawn to Weimar culture and to the legacy of its explorations of a modernity at once intractable and in transition. This was a modernity defined by states and conditions of impermanence—not only the impermanence of consumer goods or the loss of fixed values in the wake of

inflation and depression but also the impermanence of gendered categories and sexual identities in the face of an increasing visibility and mobility of classes, races, sexes, and nations. Needless to say, this exploration was not confined to Weimar Berlin or to Germany of the 1920s but was part of an international urban culture that was exported worldwide—from Berlin to Paris to Hollywood and Moscow through the work of immigrants and exiles in all realms of the industry and more broadly, via the flow of ideas and images and peoples around the globe. In its smart, skeptical, and sophisticated reflection on states of impermanence in modernity, Weimar culture remains for me a compelling site for thinking about how we live—and how we learn to live—in the modern age (see Petro 2002).

My own reasons for studying Weimar culture obviously resonate with those feminist film historians who study early cinema. I, too, am dedicated to a scholarship of historical retrieval and theoretical refinement. And yet, I still want to ask, why study early cinema, and why now?

To be sure, and this goes almost without saying, feminist scholars have been working on early cinema long before the recent surge of interest in the period. Judith Mayne, Miriam Hansen, Lauren Rabinovitz, Connie Balides, and Lucy Fischer, among others, have written powerfully and persuasively about the legacies of early cinema and have done so without relying on an opposition between theory and history and without demonizing or discarding feminist film theory in its psychoanalytic, semiotic, or textually based incarnation.[2] Although the groundswell of feminist interest in early cinema is indeed new and noteworthy, it too has important precedents in feminist scholarship that must not be forgotten.

But of course early cinema scholarship has its own long-standing traditions that (significantly and revealingly) have absolutely nothing to do with either feminist theory or history. There are those who are drawn to the study of early cinema as a way to escape the dominance not of classical narrative or of patriarchy but of feminist and other critical theories. And there are others who are simply oblivious to feminism (both early and late) and who have been attending ongoing international discussions of early cinema at Domitor and Pordenone, not to mention other conferences in Sweden, Italy, the Netherlands, and England. From what I have heard and read and understood, these events have generally tended to marginalize, condescend to, or simply ignore feminist interventions and concerns ("women's sphere," again). As a colleague recently relayed

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[2] Among many other texts, see, e g., Mayne 1990; Hansen 1991; Balides 1993; Fischer 1998; Rabinovitz 1998.

to me, it is not that individual papers are turned down or not included in these festivals or conferences. It is more that the topics selected for discussion do not lend themselves to feminist questions (since there is little interest in feminism or the kinds of questions feminist film theory poses to the study of early cinema). The result is that women get the message that their work and research are not terribly important or especially welcome. Thus, while it may seem to some that feminist film theory has dominated academic discussion in the United States, it has had little impact on international film festivals and conferences dedicated to early cinema.

This is reason enough to support the work of established and emergent feminist scholars and to encourage the recent turn to recovering and rethinking the place of women in early cinema. My only caveat is this: feminist film history gains nothing from rejecting feminist film theory of the recent past. Women "film pioneers" can be found not only in the archives, documents, and incomplete prints of early cinema; they also exist in our very midst, in the writings and essays and books of those feminist theorists who, years ago, intervened in the debates about textual analysis, progressive texts, and ideological state apparatuses in an effort to insist on the centrality of feminist issues and concerns.

Let me be clear. I am not interested in defending feminist film theory of the 1970s and 1980s against criticism. And I do not aim to hold feminist thinking harmless from revision or sustained questioning. Critical thinking and reflection are precisely what film studies are all about. Nonetheless, the assumption that feminist film theory in the 1970s and 1980s was one-dimensional and homogeneous plays into a simplistic notion of the past— and plays into academic gimmicks and fads, as in code words and covering terms such as *seventies film theory* or *gaze theory* that mistakenly promote the all-too-readily-accepted notion that feminism always and inevitably amounts to the same thing. As feminist historians we are equally theorists. It is important to remember that many of us were insisting—even and especially in the 1970s and 1980s—on a complex and differential approach to the study of women and film. This is our legacy—the legacy of feminist film studies early and late, "before" and "after" the gaze. It is also a cautionary tale about the impermanence of both modernity and our own histories, which we must constantly endeavor to rethink, refine, and recall.

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On Cyberfeminism and Cyberwomanism: High-Tech Mediations of Feminism's Discontents

Anna Everett

I n 2000 an important survey of the so-called gender divide in Internet usage concluded that for the first time the number of U.S. women online equaled that of their male counterparts.[1] A year later, it was reported that U.S. women even outpaced men in online participation. However, it should not be surprising that globally the percentage of

[1] For further details and implications of the Media Metrix and Jupiter Communications study, "It's a Woman's World Wide Web," see Donston 2000.

women online remains very low.[2] The good news/bad news scenario represented by this empirical data got me thinking about certain qualitative aspects of women's changing position within new-media environments and within feminism's changing paradigms. Clearly, such formidable technological and cultural changes are transforming women's roles in all spheres of public and private life, both locally and globally as well as inside and outside the academy.

At the height of mainstream media proclamations of the arrival of a new postfeminist age during the 1990s, feminism and cyberspace became fruitfully conjoined. As Faith Wilding characterizes it, "Linking the terms 'cyber' and 'feminism' creates a crucial new formation in the history of feminism(s) and of the e-media. Each part of the term necessarily modifies the meaning of the other" (Wilding 1997). The significant year, in my view, was 1997, an amazingly productive year for women confronting their often contradictory positions of "working with new technologies and feminist politics" (Wilding 1997). That year saw the incredible confluence of women's groundbreaking involvement in digital media technologies across theoretical, critical, and activist spheres of feminist influence. And despite technology's gender gap and racialized digital divide rhetorics, black and white women's technophilia would not be denied. Consider the First Cyberfeminist International (organized primarily by white women), a part of the Hybrid Workspace at Documenta X in Kassel, Germany; the formation of the Million Woman March organization in Philadelphia (organized predominantly by black women); and the appearance of numerous important new-media books written by women, among them, Sadie Plant's *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + the New Technoculture* (1997), a reprint of Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* ([1995] 1997), J. C. Herz's *Joystick Nation: How Videogames Ate Our Quarters, Won Our Hearts, and Rewired Our Minds* (1997), and Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake's anthology, *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (1997).

It is also instructive to see the face-to-face gatherings of the First Cyberfeminist International and Million Woman March as qualifications of the hyped and privileged discourses of the so-called posthuman condition in that both recuperated a politics of embodiment and real-life conflict against digital culture's disembodied and depoliticized consensual hallucination. In what remains of my discussion, then, I want to focus briefly

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[2] Michael Pastore considers the gender gap in global terms in "Gender Split Nearly Even by 2001" (1999).

on lessons learned from the First Cyberfeminist International and the Million Woman March's cyberwomanist activism—not only at that historical moment but also now, as women's global participation in the information society grows and develops. What I find useful to consider about these two events is how they both expand feminisms' influence on the Net while providing useful but significantly different models of politically engaged feminist praxis.

When the First Cyberfeminist International (FCI) convened in Kassel, Germany, from September 20–28, 1997, a continent away in Philadelphia the Million Woman March (MWM) organizers were finalizing the details of their march and convention planned for October 24–25, 1997. Both groups had undertaken formidable feminist projects that required computer technology for their successful organization and implementation, which, in the process, functioned simultaneously to highlight and erode what Jennifer Brayton calls "the patriarchal structuring of technology as a masculine space alienating to women" (1997). In fact, once there, these women did not find technologized space forbidding at all. Rather, the Net's combination of speech and writing via Internet relay chat (IRC), bulletin boards, listservs, and so forth was quite conducive to traditional modes and patterns of women's communicative cultures. But where the FCI met to consider how cyberfeminists might "organize to work for a feminist political and cultural environment on the Net" (Wilding 1997), the MWM met "to develop an assertive and aggressive movement" for resolving devastating problems affecting the black community in real life.[3]

For the cyberfeminists (in Germany) cyberspace itself was the primary problem, and for the cyberwomanists (in the United States), cyberspace became a primary solution. Cyberspace was a solution for the MWM's publicity vacuum caused by the mainstream media's lack of interest in the yearlong planning campaign for a political march "implemented by Black Women who interact on grassroots and global levels," MWM organizers wrote. Referring to the mobilizing power of the Internet just days after the march, one MWM organizer commented that "We . . . found that we don't need the mainstream media to publicize or endorse our events [or] ourselves."[4] The cyberwomanists had deployed the Net as an oppositional technology of power, to borrow Chela Sandoval's (2000) phrase. Alternatively, cyberspace itself was a problem for the FCI group because, as one cyberfeminist expressed it, "I am sick and tired of Virtual

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[3] The Million Woman March Statement was published online in 1997 but is no longer available.

[4] Personal e-mail correspondence from "Biggroup2," October 29, 1997.

Reality technology and cyberspace being toys for the boys. . . . I, as one of the riot girls, of the bad girls, want my own imaginary, my own projected self" (quoted in Braidotti 1996). Certainly the cyberfeminists at Documenta X came together with new imaginings of and projections for women's embodied and "posthuman" computerized relations. As Wilding, an FCI participant-informant, reminds us, "the personal computer is the political computer" (1997)—an important factor that becomes increasingly clear when we consider how many people today rely on the Net for most of their news and information. This is particularly true for those seeking alternatives to the corporate media industries.

The FCI at Kassel was notable for its apparent redeployment of second-wave feminism's consciousness-raising encounters, which were repurposed for the contemporary realities of "wired women." Wilding informs us that there were simultaneous virtual and face-to-face interactions in the form of online conversations, faxes, hands-on workshops, public lectures, discussions, and presentations in which more than thirty women from nearly ten countries and "from different economic, ethnic, professional, and political backgrounds" participated. What I found particularly interesting was Wilding's report that these women attempted "to define cyberfeminism by refusal," as they feared repeating some of feminism's earlier mistakes. But, as Wilding points out, "While cyberfeminists want to avoid the damaging mistakes of exclusion, lesbophobia, political correctness, and racism, which sometimes were a part of past feminist thinking, the knowledge, experience, and feminist analysis and strategies accumulated thus far are crucial for carrying their work forward now" (1997).

One promising outcome of the FCI was the agreement to pursue further work and research to make cyberfeminism more visible to diverse women using technology. Participants argued for creating a cyberfeminist search engine to link feminist Web sites across the globe, "forming coalitions with female technologists, programmers, scientists and hacks to link feminist Net theory, content and practice with technological research and invention; and addressing traditional gender constructions and biases built into technology" (Wilding 1997). Wilding's report on the FCI is quite instructive. She brooks no compromise with what she sees as some of cyberfeminism's weaknesses, among which she stresses its lack of historical knowledge of feminist histories and philosophies and its utopianism. This is a charge leveled especially at the bad grrrls on the Net—summed up as a cybergrrrl-ism, itself defined by "'an anything you wanna be and do in cyberspace is cool' attitude," and a "somewhat anti-theory attitude" (Wilding 1997). Ultimately, though, and in quite different ways, Rosi Braidotti, Wilding, Plant, and others recognize cyberfeminism's potential

as a promising new wave of feminist practice that can contest technolog-
ically complex territories and chart new ground for women. Despite Wild-
ing's penchant for telling (rather than suggesting or recommending)
younger women what to do to be effective cyberfeminists, I am convinced
that these exchanges among cyberfeminists, cybergrrrls, and nonwired
women are extremely exciting and beneficial. For one thing, older fem-
inists are encouraged to reconceptualize their relationships to their
younger digital sisters, daughters, cousins, and friends. The obverse holds
for younger feminists as well. This is a good thing. For even as older
feminists tell younger feminists how to do feminist history and philosophy,
younger feminists can tell older feminists how to do cyberfeminist art,
"hactivism," and technological wizardry. Finally, we can move beyond
some false or socially engineered generational barriers, develop mutual
respect, and ultimately get over the so-called nagging-mother–daughter
thing. Braidotti, a key theorist of cyberfeminism, has a workable sugges-
tion as younger and older feminists work toward developing a maturing
cyberfeminist praxis. In her influential online essay "Cyberfeminism with
a Difference," Braidotti writes, "Cyberfeminism needs to cultivate a cul-
ture of joy and affirmation. Feminist women have a long history of dancing
through a variety of potentially lethal mine-fields in their pursuit of socio-
symbolic justice. Nowadays, women have to undertake the dance through
cyberspace, if only to make sure that the joy-sticks of the cyberspace
cowboys will not reproduce univocal phallicity under the mask of mul-
tiplicity" (1996).

By the same token, I believe the cyberwomanists of the MWM also
suggest new subjectivities and new knowledges for feminism in terms of
race at the interface. When the organizers of the MWM mobilized upward
of one-and-a-half million people (mostly black women) to march on Phil-
adelphia in October 1997, few outside the group expected such a success.
Demonstrating that the Net allows organizational power that rivals (or
even surpasses) mainstream media, the march generated such response
that the financial return for the city of Philadelphia amounted to $21.7
million. Surprisingly, this amazing feat was accomplished by two local
women, Phile Chionesu and Asia Coney, who modeled the march after
the Million Man March (MMM) two years earlier. Like the MMM, the
women used the Internet to promote and publicize their event. Unlike
the MMM, however, the MWM did not have high-profile organizers to
generate mass interest in or mass publicity for their cause. Instead, these
grassroots women set up a network of Web sites, including one national
(or official) site and several regional ones in big cities across the country,
to publicize the twelve-point platform of the organization. They also

posted their mission statement, premarch workshops, accommodations and transportation logistics, the program of speakers and artists, and so forth.

That these women produced this unanticipated historic phenomenon is doubly remarkable since it occurred at the height of the digital divide's disabling rhetoric that positioned black people in general, and black women especially, as casualties of the information revolution—a new permanent underclass in the information economy. But the women found a way around this limitation and, to everyone's astonishment, enacted their stealth cyberwomanist activism by using the master's tools to tear down barriers to mass publicity for their cause. It is true that many of the march's women did not have computers at home, but those who did engaged in a bit of the "subversive tactics" that Michel de Certeau (1984) calls "making-do" (or *la perruque*). For example, at their places of work the MWM cyberwomanist office workers downloaded march organizers' directives from the official Web site and made xerox copies for their computerless counterparts, thus disguising their march work as work for the boss. March webmaster Ken Anderson told how black women office workers pulled it off and galvanized hundreds of thousands: "While I was at the March, Sisters walked up to me . . . and told me that they would not have heard about the March without the Website. I have heard from at least 30 Sisters who printed out the entire Web Site and shared it with friends, neighbors, and co-workers who weren't online yet."[5] This is significant, as Anderson makes us privy to something truly amazing in black women's tactics of "making do." By making virtual computers available to black women who "weren't online yet," march supporters with access to the Net, either through their jobs or in-home Internet service providers (ISPs), effectively transformed low-tech, sixties-era mimeograph activism into high-tech, new-millennial digital news and information flows. In fact, since "huge numbers of female employees occupy clerical jobs that use computers for processing payroll, word-processing, conducting inventory, sales, and airline reservations (more than 16 million held such positions in the United States in 1993)" (Seiter 2000, 237), it is surprising that it took the MWM to actualize this enormous potential. In a turn on the usual racial hierarchy of feminism, these black feminists were at the forefront of cyberactivism—and indeed inspired their white counterparts who later organized the Million Mom March for gun control. What is exciting and promising here is that these MWM cyberwomanist organizers utilized cyberspace to enlist support for their platform issues, which, according to their mission state-

[5] Personal correspondence, Ken Anderson, October 30, 1997.

ment, included bringing about "a probe into the CIA's participation in and its relationship to the influx of drugs into the African American community," the rehabilitation of "Black women upon leaving the penal system," the examination of "Human Rights violations of Africans in the Americas and their effects," the cessation of "gentrification of our neighborhoods," and the "reclaiming of our elders' rights." In sum, the MWM posted this rationale for the march's raison d'être: "For the day and the time for Black women (African women), has come, and the time for self-destruction, injustice, racism, and all such practices put to [an] end." The sistahs of the march recognized the value of new technologies to further their own agendas and to promote their brand of activism, which did not require choosing which liberation struggle to fight first, gender or race oppression.

When taken together, the MWM and the FCI illustrate quite well why the statistical data have changed to reflect women's increasing adoption of the Internet and other new digital technologies to suit their own multivalent needs and desires. The point is that feminists of all stripes have found the Internet especially productive for reconfiguring and reimagining the public sphere and mass publicity. In the years following 1997, feminisms' profiles have grown in online environments, as my own recent Google searches indicate. As of this writing, a Google key-word search of various feminisms yields the following results: (1) "women" and "the internet" = 2,410,000; (2) "feminism" and "the internet" = 80,400; (3) "feminism" = 702,000; (4) "womanism" and "the internet" = 182; (5) "womanism" = 3,120; (6) "cyberfeminism" and "the internet" = 1,890; (7) "cyberfeminism" = 4,720; (8) "cyberwomanism" = 10 (although most of these results refer to the same single source, an endnote in Wilding 1997).

While the two million–plus numbers for the key-word string "women" and "the internet" were somewhat expected, the relatively significant numbers for the others were not. I see today's Google numbers as cause for cautious optimism, even though a small number of "Anti-feminism Discussion and Resources . . . Hate Groups" are tallied among the key-word search results for "feminism" and "the internet." In the main, I want to suggest that this amount of cyber settling appears to respond affirmatively to the FCI's 1997 concerns, among them "to make cyberfeminism more visible and effective in reaching diverse populations of women using technology" and to create "a cyberfeminist search engine that could link strategic feminist websites" (Wilding 1997). For example, included among Google's top ten matches for the key word "feminism" are: Eserver-Feminism and Women's Studies, Feminist Theory Website, Feminism and

the Net—a guide for fun feminists, Russian Feminism Resources, and Feminist.com.[6]

This promise does not mitigate the reality of the counterproductive, hegemonic sexism, classism, racism, and homophobia that dominate the Web and other new-media platforms. While these inroads cannot be minimized, they do not supplant face-to-face activisms and creativity, particularly in the case of the MWM; most significantly they function as phenomenal augmentations. Yes, patriarchy is alive and well online, as in real life. Nonetheless, cyberfeminism and cyberwomanism are also alive, well, and destined to grow in instance and influence as women increasingly outpace men in Internet participation. There should be little doubt that women (through Web logs [aka blogs] and other cyberactivist practices) were active in mobilizing large numbers of antiwar protests in the recent global resistance to the Bush/Cheney administration's war for "Iraqi Freedom."

It seems to me that the next urgent question for feminists, cyberfeminists, cyberwomanists, womanists, and cybergrrrls is, What can we as a collective do to address the next big threat to all manner of feminisms— the emergence of so-called New Women Warriors in service to neoimperialist nations? Talk about "killing feminism"—quite literally our post-9/11 new world disorder is what the most potent new signifier of female equity and agency represents. Soldiers Jessica Lynch (white), the late Lori Piestewa (Native American), and Shoshana Johnson (black) are emblematic of an alarming coalition of poor, working-class, interracial, multinational women who literally are dying for their right to kill other women. For all we've discussed, it seems to me that this latest new-economy, new-millennial development is what really ails feminism.

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[6] It is true that a large number of these entries are listings from publishers of specific books about and for feminists, course listings and assignments, independent personal pages, individual scholarly essays, and nongovernmental organization Web sites. Still, they extend the reach of these once very isolated endeavors.

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Looking at the Past from the Present: Rethinking Feminist Film Theory of the 1970s

Laura Mulvey

I t has been difficult for me to respond to the challenging task that has been set by this special issue of *Signs*. I will attempt to frame my response around questions about lost continuities and fissures in the stretch of time between now and the key formative moment for my

thought, the 1970s. Over the last few years, I have been thinking about the way that a break or fissure in the continuities of history has come to separate a "then" of the 1970s, the moment of origin, at least in Britain, of feminist film theory and practice, from a "now." Any relation of continuity or conceptual dialogue across the decades seems harder and harder to maintain. A question then arises: Why should this constitute a problem? After all, feminism had close links with the intellectual frameworks of modernism and socialism, both of which worked to create a break with the past, politically and aesthetically. From my perspective, the problem lies there: the tradition of utopian aspiration, which marked my involvement with feminist theory and practice, foundered during the 1980s.

Roughly speaking there are two sides to this development. First, looking back from the perspective of the twenty-first century, the first phase of feminism, identified with the women's movement, seems more closely tied to, and located within, the culture and politics of its age than, perhaps, feminists acknowledged at the time. Second, although the initial excitement of the feminist challenge to patriarchal society still seemed so new in the 1980s, the changed political and economic climate was disorienting. Perhaps inevitably, feminism's most lasting legacy has been within the cultural and academic spheres. It would be perfectly reasonable, therefore, to emphasize that feminism's influence outstripped any actual political movement and that, in the worlds of art and film, for instance, women's presence as makers, curators, and critics has expanded enormously over the last two decades. Furthermore, new horizons have opened up with new technologies, offering important and innovative channels through which women can communicate, organize, and raise consciousness. To my mind, however, this sense of fissure in historical continuity poses a political problem, particularly as the loss in momentum has, above all, affected the left.

As I expect many of the contributors to this special issue will have much greater experience and awareness of contemporary developments than I have, I would like to focus my contribution on the relation of the present to the past. The history of cinema plays a central part in my argument. The cinema, too, as I will discuss further on, reached, over the 1990s, a point of fissure between its celluloid-based, mechanical technology prevalent throughout most of the twentieth century and its recent, complex relation with new electronic and digital technologies. Itself facing an "end of an era," the cinema can thus provide a means for reflecting on history and its representation and for negotiating back across the divide.

The cinema's one-hundredth birthday in 1995 may have been a temporal marker of purely symbolic importance, but symbolism coincided with objective, material changes in its conditions of production, distri-

bution, and consumption. The arrival of video and then, more signifi-
cantly, digital technologies marked a definite end of an era for the way in
which celluloid had functioned within the sphere of mass entertainment
and within that of radical or avant-garde aesthetics during the greater part
of the twentieth century. The initial conjuncture between film and fem-
inism came at the very end of that era. Despite its original and profound
impact on the aesthetics and politics of cinema, feminist film theory and
practice had close links with the tradition of cinephilia. It was a last wave,
following the great Third Cinema movements, above all in Latin America,
and the European and North American avant-gardes of the 1960s. For
these movements, cinema was of central importance as a symptom and
symbol of utopian political teleology. Not only could cinema articulate
the desire for a better world, its complex way of interpreting and repre-
senting could also produce both critique and new ways of seeing. For
feminism, this was particularly the case: the cinema doubled as a major
means of women's oppression through image and as a means of liberation
through transformation and reinvention of its forms and conventions. (Of
course, this is all extremely familiar to any reader of *Signs*.)

In Britain, any sense that the utopian aspiration could be realized as a
political program and have a transformative effect within the social world
came to an end quite suddenly in the early 1980s. The women's movement
had been struggling to change the place of women in society by means
of protest and organization and to transform women's place in culture
and representation through a massive contribution from women artists
and filmmakers, to both mainstream and experimental film. When Mar-
garet Thatcher was elected prime minister in 1979, her policies rapidly
cut off the sources of public funding that had brought feminist filmmaking
into existence as a movement. At the same time, the arrival of Channel
4, in 1982, opened up new possibilities for independent work within
television. Although Channel 4 did, indeed, produce interesting and ex-
perimental work, commitment to film as a medium began to wane; 16
mm became more expensive and video more viable. Furthermore, during
the 1980s television became the most powerful medium for exposing and
resisting the effects of Thatcherism and charting, in drama and docu-
mentary, the changing political, economic, and social climate. Within
mainstream politics, Thatcher's defeat of the unions meant that the very
industries that had sustained working-class militancy were swept away.
New sources of employment, an increase in service industries, and the
growth of communications technologies gradually shifted the economic
landscape. Paradoxically, these shifts in industry and economics opened
up more work opportunities for women, although the reality was very far

from the dream of active unionization and social support systems for which the women's movement had campaigned.

During the 1980s, events on a world scale marked the point at which the traditions of progressive politics could no longer struggle against the changing balance between left and right. The success of neoliberal economics, the collapse of communism, the globalization of capitalism, the export of industry to nonunionized developing economies, the impoverishment of Africa, and an increase in racism both in Europe and other parts of the world definitively changed the political spectrum. It was these events of the 1980s that marked a watershed, a gap in the continuity of history that created a "before" and an "after," a "then" and a "now." During this period, not only was it impossible to maintain the progressive optimism of the 1970s, it was also hard to privilege the problems of women (especially those of developed economies) and the priorities of film feminism while left politics failed in postcolonial and third-world countries. My interest in looking back across these catastrophes lies, however, not just in mourning the past but in maintaining a critical engagement with the threads that might keep it alive. These watershed years also coincided with the arrival of new visual media technologies that relegated cinema to the "then" side of the divide.

New technologies can transform the way that the cinema of the past is seen and thus understood, creating a fundamental paradox: while the electronic and the digital have aged the celluloid medium, they have also revitalized cinema and given new life to its past. In the 1970s I wrote about the voyeuristic spectator, my original point of engagement with feminism and film theory. Then the concept depended, in the first instance, on certain material conditions of cinema exhibition: darkness, the projector beam lighting up the screen, the procession of images that imposed their own rhythm on the spectator's attention. And, of course, the particular structure of spectacle that the Hollywood studios, above all, refined so perfectly through the eroticized streamlined image of the female star. In contradistinction, I later tried to evolve a different concept of spectatorship, one driven by curiosity and a desire to decipher the images unfolding on the screen. However, the curious spectator was, by and large, the product of feminism, of the avant-garde, and of a consciously alternative relation to cinema. Furthermore, the idea of curiosity as a drive not only to see but also to decipher and deconstruct belonged to the utopian aspiration and belief in the cinema of modernism. But still, this spectator is the ancestor of the one formed by new modes of relating to the screen image now immediately accessible to anyone who cares to experiment with the equipment available.

To my mind, as the spectator controls the unfolding of the cinematic

image, so the drive of the narrative is weakened and other, previously invisible or unimportant details come to the fore. With a shift in the pace and order of a film, documentary presence overwhelms fiction. As narrative coherence fragments, the moment in which an object, figure, or event is actually inscribed on the original material suddenly finds visibility in the slowed or stilled image. Not only does spectatorship find new forms, it can also allow space for reflection on time, on the presence of history preserved on film (whether as fiction or nonfiction), producing a "pensive" spectator.

I have borrowed the concept of the pensive spectator from Raymond Bellour's (1987) article, "The Pensive Spectator." It is intended to evoke the thoughtful reflection on the film image that is now possible by seeing into the screen's images, stretching them into new dimensions of time and space. The creation of a film fragment leads to the discovery of the stillness inherent in the celluloid-based moving image, paradoxically revealed by a detour into another medium. Here the pensive spectator can confront the film's original moment of registration. In this hybrid relation between the celluloid original and its new electronic carrier, there is time to reflect on time itself and on the presence of the past and on the thenness of the photographic process. To my mind, it is primarily the historic cinema of celluloid that can blossom into new significance and beauty when its original stillness, its material existence in the photogram, is revealed in this way. The new allows a fresh and unfamiliar insight into the old. Just as the early theorists of film celebrated the way that the camera could reveal more of the world than was perceptible to the naked eye, now the pensive spectator can discover more in the celluloid image than could be seen at twenty-four frames per second.

It was during the watershed period of the 1980s, marked aesthetically by postmodernism and politically/economically by neoliberalism, that cinema acquired its own division between the "then," its past based on celluloid recording and projection, and the "now," a present proliferated into complex relations to other technologies and media. It is this division that has led certain theorists to pronounce the cinema "dead." But if this figuration is reworked, if the figure of opposition is woven into a more dialectical relationship rather than separated along binary lines, another picture might begin to emerge.

Just as cinema had, at various points throughout its century, offered a framework or metaphor for contemporary radical aspiration, it may be logical to consider whether its hybrid descendent might offer a framework or metaphor within which the problem of historical loss and discontinuity might be thought or imagined. The cinema in its present configuration, combining its long celluloid memory with its new digital capacity, might

offer a means for negotiating and forging connections across the divide. There are two points of departure here: first, how the history of the cinema itself might be reconfigured alongside its changing relation to technologies; and second, how the cinema might be used as a means of looking back at history through the images it has recorded over the course of the twentieth century. The cinema may now be turned back on itself, into a means of looking backward at history, at the cultures of modernity now seemingly rendered archaic.

It is hard, perhaps, for cinephiles to look backward without nostalgic disappointment at the realization that the cinema's promise, its close relationship with modernity, has aged. However, it is precisely this relationship that now demands a backward look, not of nostalgia but of analysis. The idea of a break in history, the separation between a "now" and a "then," is fertile ground for nostalgia and a sentimental idealization of the past. For instance, old film footage plays a crucial part in the nostalgia that now haunts British television, and a political agenda inevitably affects the recycling of archive material. At a time when the descendants of those who suffered under British colonialism are now suffering from discrimination and racism in Britain today, the use of film footage depicting the imperial past and its narration is a matter for contestation. (I write the day after the British National Party [BNP] has gained a foothold on the local council of the old mill town of Burnley.)[1] In contrast, for example, Vincent Monnikendam has created a compilation film, *Mother Dao—the Turtlelike* (1995), about the process of colonization in Indonesia, from film shot by the Dutch Colonial Office from the early years of the century to 1930. Thus a story of the oppression and exploitation of the Indonesian people has been created out of the very footage shot by the Dutch authorities themselves.

Feminist film theory and practice emerged at the end of the economic boom and social transformations that followed World War II, bringing promise not only to its main beneficiaries, the industrialized countries, but also, over the following decades, to those struggling against colonialism and neocolonialism. Perhaps the sense of political optimism combined with semiotic and psychoanalytic theory during the late 1960s and the 1970s to create an intellectual and aesthetic challenge to film's depiction of reality. It was of great political importance for feminist theory to question the relation between image and referent, to demonstrate that commodified

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[1] The BNP is the far right of British politics, for all intents and purposes a fascist party with a racist, anti-immigrant policy It has recently found some support in areas suffering from mass unemployment as a result of deindustrialization.

images of women had their origins in psychic structures that bore little or no relation to "reality." Now, aesthetic and intellectual priorities have shifted with the political shifts that have brought the forces of neoliberal imperialism back to prominence, and the stories of their victims are increasingly lost within history. In this process, the familiar indexicality of the celluloid image, the literal inscription on the celluloid material of the contents of the moment at which it was shot, takes on a new value. Fiction, newsreel, documentary, or any other kind of filmmaking can be seen as a "fact." On the other hand, the arrival of digital technology brings a new sense of uncertainty with it. The displaced relation between the celluloid image and its nonindexical carrier undermines the stability and certainty suggested by the material presence of the index. In the last resort, the conjuncture between the two media—cinematic and electronic—opens up a space for reflection on time itself, in which other temporalities may be found concealed within the irrevocable drive of linear narrative time. The cinema, refracted through the new technology, not only provides the raw material for reforging links across the great divide of the 1980s but also suggests a metaphor for reflecting on the difficulty of understanding time and history. From this perspective, feminist alternative histories, the reconfiguring of storytelling, and the questioning of given patterns of temporality provide an invaluable point of departure.

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First Fictions

There will first of all be a problem with firsts: first woman, first fiction. Still, I want to ask if we could, and to wonder if we should, make the argument that Alice Guy-Blaché's one-minute one-shot *La fée aux choux* (The cabbage fairy) is the first fiction film.[1] To begin with, the notion of "the first woman to do something" carries with it the potential to effect a swift reversal of prevailing assumptions. My purpose, however, is not just to assert that Guy-Blaché was the first *woman* filmmaker. That is uncontested. But to say that this was the first time that something was done *and* that it was done for this first time by a woman is quite another. The theoretical and political ramifications are immediately more significant. Much is at stake in this "first" for feminism as well as for film history. Not only would the film canon require readjustment, but history texts would require revision. Just think of the breakthrough for feminism if we were to establish that the first fiction film ever is a film made by a woman and that in it, a fairy pulls from behind giant wooden cabbages not one but three babies!

Most important, I want to see if this claim can be made, but as I attempt to argue that this is a "first" I will intentionally undermine my own argument by asking whether or not we want to make such a claim at all. In the end, I may make a case, convincing to some, for seeing Guy-

[1] It is difficult to definitively date many films produced in the earliest years of cinema. Since this essay is about the very problem of dating, I have discussed but not "given" dates in several cases. The same can be said for directorial credit as well as film titles. It is not certain that these films were "directed" in the modern sense, and the variations in titles listed in company catalogs and publicity suggest that there may have been as many versions as titles. Or, as in the case discussed here, one popular title came to be used for all versions. The proliferation of versions and titles characterizes this period before copyright law went into effect, when many companies remade films produced by other companies, or, as in the example here, companies frequently remade their own films. For these reasons, none of the early films discussed in this essay is included in the reference list.

Blaché's *La fée aux choux* as the first fiction film. And if I do make such a case, there is no way of then taking it all back. Film theory has been here before, certainly in the early 1970s in Jean-Louis Comolli's ([1971] 1990) challenge to "linear" historiography in issues of *Cahiers du cinéma*. The temptation to use those metaphors of "birth" or growth from infancy follows from the linear model of development and discovery—the very model that could not accommodate the possibility of this film. However, it will be especially difficult to resist these metaphors given the circumstances surrounding this historical case as well as the thematics of the film itself.[2] Here, however, our very interest in the question of "the first" should be attributed less to an investment in inaugural moments themselves than to a fascination with the problem of where, how, and whether to begin.[3] In what follows, I offer a reconception that espouses the impossibility of reconception, of either beginning "to start with" or beginning again, a reconception that dramatizes the problem of locating originary moments of conception.

There is a strong legacy of refusal in feminist film theory, going back almost three decades to the modernist aesthetics espoused at the end of Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975).[4] In the spirit of this earlier criticism, we can renounce the first just as feminists rejected the sexualized body of woman in patriarchal cinema. Yet the legacy of the negative comes with the lessons learned about the difficulty of the hard line where refusal never did rectify exclusion. Where earlier one kind of exclusion (woman as filmmaker) was answered with another kind of exclusion (woman as image), here the equation has changed. To rectify the record we must at once imagine a new order—but, as I argue, less an order of originality than an order of unoriginality in which a "birth" narrative troubles assumptions about parentage rather than patriarchy. There are other theoretical justifications for making the distinction of the first the focus of this discussion, among them ways in which "firstness"

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[2] Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell (1983) discuss the significance of Comolli's argument as well as the problems with the alternative approaches to the history of cinema. In sum, they say, "Discussions of influence, of first times and of the decisive deeds of outstanding individuals often appeal to this model of linearity" (5).

[3] Edward Said has said that it is indeed a paradox that "an interest in beginnings is often the corollary result of not believing that any beginning can be located" (1985, 5).

[4] Counter to the legacy of the representation of women in patriarchal (classical Hollywood) cinema, Mulvey (1975) strategizes the refusal to represent the body of woman on screen. This "counter-cinema" strategy, with its origins in the experimental theater of Bertolt Brecht and the cinema of Jean-Luc Godard, influenced two decades of women filmmakers before it was found to be untenable.

opens up the philosophical questions of origin and return as well as ways in which our empirical findings anticipate our theoretical investments. Here, also, the question of the first "what" forces a reexamination of the reigning paradigm of opposites in film theory today: the "cinema of attractions" as it has been opposed to the "cinema of narrative integration," as I will discuss. Implicated as well is a longer-standing set of opposites: documentary and fiction, although this discussion will be abbreviated here. We will need to determine the degree to which the recently discovered print of what is probably and quite possibly (but not absolutely certainly) *La fée aux choux* confirms or problematizes the historical scheme implied in "attractions" versus "narrative." But first (again first), we need to concern ourselves with the difference, if any, between a fiction film and a narrative film.

First what?

Actually, the case has already been made. It has already been asserted by feminist scholars, in the first encyclopedic overviews, that Guy-Blaché was not only the first woman director in the international film industry but that in France, during her first job with Léon Gaumont, she made a new type of film. But what kind of a film? She is variously credited with having made the "first film with a plot" (Foster 1995, 161), the "first scripted fiction film ever" (Kuhn 1990, 184), and the first film that "tells a story" (Quart 1988, 18). Guy-Blaché is also said to have been the "first woman director and possibly the first director to bring a story-film to the screen" (Katz 1979, 319). Despite what would appear to be an overwhelming number of nominations, however, Guy-Blaché's *La fée aux choux* is not even a footnote in basic film history textbooks, and there has been no serious discussion of the chronological or theoretical problems that would arise if we were to make a place for it in the film history canon. There are two simple reasons for the exclusion of *La fée aux choux*, and it seems wise to consider them before probing the more complicated ones. First, until recently there was no known extant print that scholars could point to as having been shot in or around April 1896. The existence of a print identified at the Swedish film archive in 1996 changes our orientation to these events.[5] It is important to note that the most likely production date

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[5] A 35-mm print is in the Swedish Film Institute in Stockholm and is part of the Sieurin French collection, a group of Gaumont films from the turn of the century Jan Olsson and Tom Gunning first identified it, and later Alison McMahan and Sabine Lenk wrote about it, McMahan confirming their identification. See McMahan 2002, 20, for more, as well as McMahan and Lenk 1999

for *La fée aux choux* is four months after the first public screening of the Lumière films in the Salon Indien of the Grand Café in Paris on December 28, 1895. For our purposes here, this version, quite possibly although not certainly a print struck from the original negative, will stand for Guy-Blaché's earliest effort.

One would think that the discovery of such an important piece of early cinema history would cause the field to undergo a seismic shift. However, the second "simple" reason for the exclusion of *La fée aux choux* has conspired with the first reason to justify skepticism and, consequently, reluctance to look closely at this new discovery.[6] The most important source of the information that Guy-Blaché's first attempt at filmmaking was called *La fée aux choux* has been Guy-Blaché's own memoirs (Blaché 1996). Even more than the few interviews and fan magazine articles, the memoirs have been the structural source of the background of an amazing career. They begin with her position as secretary to Gaumont, taking us through her important work at the Gaumont Studios as director-producer (1896–1907) and continuing through her marriage to Herbert Blaché and collaboration with him on films produced by her Solax Company in New Jersey (1907–13).[7]

McMahan, the preeminent scholar of the French as well as the American work of Guy-Blaché, asserts that this crucial figure was responsible for directing or producing as many as one thousand short and feature films in the years 1896 to around 1920 (McMahan 2002, xxvii). Thus, the question of the first effort in such a long and significant career suddenly becomes pressing. For historians, the crucial passage in Guy-Blaché's memoirs is this:

> At Belleville, next to the photographic laboratories, I was given an unused terrace with an asphalt floor (which made it impossible to set up a real scene) and a shaky glass ceiling, overlooking a vacant

[6] There is also a third reason that *La fée aux choux* may not have been considered a viable first As McMahan (2002, 13) recounts the dilemma for historians, it has to do with the appearance of the title in the Gaumont catalog. Reprinted in the appendix of her book, it appears as no. 379 in the April 1900–September 1900 catalog, which appeared in 1901: *La Fée aux choux ou la Naissance des enfants. Une fée dépose des bébés vivants qu'elle retire des choux Très gros Succès* (McMahan 2002, 306). But, says McMahan, the earliest film catalogs are not reliable sources of information about production or release dates (2002, 14).

[7] In recent years, the memoirs have become the focus of scholarship in which a new generation of female researchers has asked why so much of Guy-Blaché's work was lost or misattributed and how she understood her own contribution to the industry that first welcomed her and then squeezed her out. See Gaines 2002 and Hastie 2002.

> lot. . . . A backdrop painted by a fan-painter (and fantasist) from
> the neighborhood made a vague decor, with rows of wooden cab-
> bages cut out by a carpenter, costumes rented here and there around
> the Port Saint-Martin. As actors: my friends, a screaming baby, an
> anxious mother leaping to and fro into the camera focus, and my
> first film *La Fée Aux choux* was born. (Blaché 1996, 28)

Note, in relation to our concerns, that there is no reference here to either
"narrative" or "fiction." The absence of either of these highly charged
descriptive markers in relation to an early—if not the earliest—example
of a new kind of film opens up a large set of questions about an old
dichotomy that governed film history and consequently film theory for
decades: documentary versus fiction film. The memoirs suggest that the
young secretary's efforts were designed to take this invention in a new
direction, based on her dissatisfaction with what she here calls "demon-
stration" films, all of which were "actualités," historically understood as
precursors of the documentary: "Daughter of an editor, I had read a good
deal and retained quite a bit. I had done a little amateur theatricals and
I thought that one might do better than these demonstration films. Gath-
ering my courage, I timidly proposed to Gaumont that I might write one
or two little scenes and have a few friends perform in them" (Blaché 1996,
27). By *demonstration*, Guy-Blaché means film that was used to dem-
onstrate the operations of the camera itself; it is clear that the Gaumont
company, like others at this early stage, viewed the film footage they shot
as a means of selling cameras before they saw the profitability of having
their own distribution sideline.[8] But Guy-Blaché also seems to be con-
trasting the demonstration film with the material in the literature she had
read (one assumes imaginative fiction) as well as with the theatrical work
she had already undertaken in which performance and quite possibly re-
hearsal were involved. Relevant here are the references to "writing" and
"scenes" as well as to "performance." Still, in contrasting her work with
the less-interesting demonstration films, she mentions neither "fiction"
nor "narrative."

   While many references in this memoir point to features we associate
with the realm of fiction, Guy-Blaché uses the term *little scenes* rather than
either *story* or *narrative*, and thus later historians claimed for her some-
thing that she did not originally claim: that *La fée aux choux* was a work

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[8] McMahan says that although the memoirs could certainly be interpreted as implying
that Guy-Blaché thought of herself as having produced the first fiction film, Guy-Blaché's
own correspondence does not support this insofar as she writes that *L'Arroseur arrosé* was
produced before her own film (2002, 12).

of fiction and a story with a plot. Among the most important possible explanations for Guy-Blaché's reluctance to say that she had produced the first fiction film might be her deference to the history of cinema as it had already been written. Certainly from the earliest film histories until the present, the Lumière company's *L'Arroseur arrosé* (The waterer watered) has been cited as one of the earliest fiction films, if not *the* first (fig. 1). Even Guy-Blaché herself appears to have accepted a view of history in which the Lumière comedy about a rascal who turns the hose on the gardener is the first, and we assume that she saw it as predating her own *La fée aux choux*. But some confusion appears as early as the English translation of one of the first book-length histories in the 1930s, Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach's *The History of Motion Pictures* (1938), the earliest general history I have found that makes reference to Guy-Blaché's very early work at Gaumont.[9]

The Iris Barry translation of Bardèche and Brasillach starts out confidently, "It is one of the peculiarities of this particular art that we can set the date of its birth" (1938, 3). It should be noted that the version here of this "birth" is quite different from later ones. *L'Arroseur arrosé*, translated by Barry as *Teasing the Gardener*, is the "first comic film" (1938, 5). Strangely, the term *film-histoire*, or story-film, is used in reference to the Gaumont film, *Les Méfaits d'une tête de veau*, translated as *The Misadventures of a Piece of Veal*. But whereas in the French the text is relatively ambiguous about Guy-Blaché's work on this film, in the English, she is the "actress." To add to the confusion, the story of the making of *La fée aux choux* that appears in her memoirs is recalled as the story of the making of a comedy about a calf's head. It would seem, however, that Gaumont's secretary was early associated with the creation of fictional spaces as well as storytelling. In Barry's translation, "The actress thought it would be a good idea to play the scene against an artificial island instead of a real background." The backdrop painter is part of this account, as is the spontaneous recruitment of actors. In the English, the paragraph ends with a flourish, with the translation of "et ce fut ce premier *film-histoire* de Léon Gaumont" as "the first narrative film of Léon Gaumont was created" (Bardèche and Brasillach 1935, 15; 1938, 7). I cite this not only to suggest how easily historical accounts yield to prevailing assumptions about gen-

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[9] At least one French history makes reference to both *La fée aux choux ou la naissance des enfants* and to Gaumont's secretary Alice Guy as having experimented with cardboard cabbages (see Deslandes and Richard 1968, 330–31). Two recent histories of French cinema in English rectify the situation somewhat by mentioning Guy-Blaché, but neither refers to *La fée aux choux* (see Williams 1992, 56–57, Abel 1998, 11).

Figure 1 *Le Jardinier* (The gardener; Lumière 1895), an earlier version of *L'Arroseur arrosé*

der, crediting Guy-Blaché's employer, Gaumont, with "a" first narrative, although not "the" first narrative. I cite it also as a dramatization (at the outset of written film history) of the enormous difficulty of attribution, particularly in the face of so many distinct versions of films, differently titled. Still, we should continue to be perplexed by the reference in Barry's translation to the Gaumont company's "first narrative," particularly since we are given no help with the question of what made one film a narrative and another not—or not yet—a narrative. Recent film history, however, has devoted a good deal of effort to this question, and I will turn to its debates momentarily, but before doing this I want to set any such discussion within a larger frame: that of the confusion between *fiction* and *narrative*, which manifests itself in a tendency to use these terms as virtually synonymous.

My readers may by now be impatient. Why wouldn't Guy-Blaché's *La fée aux choux* be a fiction film? Let's say that we start with the oldest known English-language understanding of fiction, when, in the fourteenth century, *ficcions* meant "imaginary worlds" but evolved to cover cases of invention where deception might be involved, retaining some of the connotations of falsity in the root word *frign*. We could easily make a case for seeing *La fée aux choux* over *L'Arroseur arrosé* as the more fictional of two fictions if we were to stress the artifice of the painted backdrop and the constructed prop—the wooden cabbages—in the former over the "found" prop—the garden hose—in the latter. We could also make a comparison between the two gardens—one represented by a theatrical set and the other represented by a preexisting "natural" garden. There is also the question of the use of costumes and character as well as the performance of scenes to which Guy-Blaché calls our attention in her own later account. Clearly if we were to compare the two on the basis of theatrical artifice as the criterion for fiction, *La fée aux choux* would win hands down as the first fiction. But far more important in the evolution of the definition of film fiction, so often loosely associated with narrative, has been the question of staged as opposed to spontaneous action—suggesting how our attempt to understand these earliest experiments is haunted by what cinema would become and by the more recent opposition of documentary recording to the constructions of Hollywood narrative (where the term *fiction* is now redundant).[10] There is one other way we could approach

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[10] Dai Vaughan raises the question of the difference between a "fiction film" and a "filmed fiction" and contrasts what might be understood as performing as opposed to behaving (1990, 65–66). One could argue that this discussion is rendered moot by contemporary film

this question of the fictionality of the earliest scenes, one that puts on hold the fraught question of what constitutes a narrative and consequently what counts as the earliest "story" film. If we consider how the work situates its viewer in relation to existing or imaginary worlds, we may be able to circumvent the problem. This would involve, following Edward Branigan (1992), the notion of reading "fictively," best understood in contrast to reading a work as nonfiction. Here, it is a question of the generality or specificity of reference—the nonfiction work (or, as I prefer, the "not fiction") referring to "the" one-of-a-kind world as we know it, and the fiction work referring to "a" conventionalized world that might or might not be an existing world. How we take up the references is all in the devices that "cue" us to read a scene as not fiction or as fiction. Thus, the artifice of sets and costumes in films cues us to read fictively, with the representation of such a totally "nonexistent" creature such as a griffin (or a fairy) cinching our reading (Branigan 1992, 199, 201). Again, a world in which a fairy character enacts the delivery of babies from cabbage wombs gives us no option but to read fictively. In the absence of evidence that the Lumières thought in terms of script or actors, we can only speculate about the operative concept that governed the production of *L'Arroseur arrosé*, which is, perhaps, more important to consider as a comedy than as a fiction.

Not quite, not yet narrative

If we thought that the "first fiction" issue in early cinema was difficult, the question of first narrative seems even more treacherous, at least based on relatively recent attempts to locate the beginning of the narrative tradition in cinema, some of which focus on *L'Arroseur arrosé*.[11] However,

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theory, where Christian Metz's (1976) "every film is a fiction film" (in its effective illusionism) is countered by Bill Nichols's "every film is a documentary" (2001, 1). Of the histories in French, work by Jacques Deslandes and Jacques Richard is the most detailed at this moment, citing one of Guy-Blaché's own recollections from 1952 and stating that the subject of *La fée aux choux ou la naissance des enfants* was taken from a genre of French postcards (1968, 300–332). Both Georges Sadoul and later Jean Mitry also have mentions of *La fée aux choux* (Sadoul 1947, 84–86, Mitry 1967, 122).

[11] On narrative theory in early cinema, see Marshall Deutelbaum, who looks at the Lumière *actualités*, most notably *Sortie d'usine* (Employees leaving the factory), in which he finds a distinguishable beginning and ending (1979, 30). *L'Arroseur arrosé* is understood as also having these features but is different from a film like *Sortie d'usine* in that in the watering of the waterer the "event depicted is not discovered but created, not recorded but acted, the whole a unified design" (1979, 35). André Gaudreault discusses the "passage" between

just when the question of the complete narrative as opposed to a narrative fragment was raised, new developments shifted the focus from the structural analysis of narrative. The need to structurally compare a film in which a fairy plucks three babies (one, two, and three) from behind cabbages and a film in which a naughty boy plays a trick on a gardener was obviated, at least for the time being. Early cinema, certainly films made between 1895 and 1906, has now been defined more in terms of the cinema of attractions than anything else. Evolving from the first reference in an article by Gaudreault and Gunning (1989) and later refined by Gunning in a series of articles ([1989] 1995, [1993] 1996), the cinema of attractions as a concept has single-handedly revolutionized film theory as well as film history.[12] Given the influence of this paradigm in the present period, it is not surprising that McMahan would assert that *La fée aux choux* "falls purely into the realm of the cinema of attractions" (2002, 22), as would the earliest phase of Guy-Blaché's career. There is no doubt that Gunning's formulation has held in check a problematic tendency in film criticism to use categories borrowed from literary theory to try to define story structure in cinema. Judith Mayne has stated that searching for the narrative functions of early cinema devices represents a "desire to see early film not on its own terms" (1990, 164). Thus, one way of understanding the ascendance of the attractions paradigm is to see the concept as having curtailed the interest in the origins of narrative. But the attractions paradigm is less an attempt to merely counteract the tendency to see narrative everywhere than an attempt to entirely change the subject for early cinema.

Admittedly, there are ways in which the paradigm of the cinema of attractions outlines a more comprehensive entry into *La fée aux choux* than an approach that is too eager to find in this work the germ of the narrative industry that cinema would become. Indeed, much of the terminology Gunning uses in his later, more developed article on the cinema of attractions ([1993] 1996) appears at first to perfectly explain and describe this short, one-shot film in which a woman dressed as a fairy discovers babies hidden behind wooden cabbages. From the garden path in the center of

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equilibrium and disequilibrium and back, making a case for seeing the watering of the waterer who then waters the waterer as less fragmentary and more complete, but although he finds the film remarkable as "one of the very first films to present a minimal complete plot," he is reluctant to declare *L'Arroseur arrosé* a "first narrative" ([1984] 1990). Gaudreault (1988), however, has since modified his conclusions.

[12] See also Gunning (1986) 1990. Linda Williams argues that Gunning's "cinema of attractions" has begun to rival the earlier formulation by Mulvey (1975) in the frequency with which it is now cited (Williams 1995, 11). Further, she says, its appeal is that it addresses the very aspects "undervalued" in the "visual pleasure and narrative cinema" paradigm (11).

the frame, the fairy gestures with graceful, dancelike movements, quickly tiptoeing right to the front row of cabbages, where she finds first one infant and then another. She places each of these tiny, squirming babies in the foreground in front of the cabbage rows. After twirling around, she locates another baby on the left side of the frame, further back. But this one, obviously a stiff doll, is placed back on the ground behind the cabbage row, a gesture implying that the third baby is not ready to be picked. The figure that faces and plays toward the camera could easily be seen as within the tradition of what Gunning understands as the "technological exhibitionism" of the cinema of attractions in which this newest of entertainments "displays" its devices—the most fascinating of which is movement ([1993] 1996, 73–75). That this earliest of experiments gestures overtly toward its spectator is undeniable—each "ripe" baby is held up for the viewer to see. Babies and cabbages "come to life" on the screen, "moving like" in addition to "looking like" cabbages and babies. "Lifelikeness" in and of itself is an attraction.

Gunning goes further in his formulation of "attractions" in "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator" ([1989] 1995) and, in doing so, also answers the question of narrative, albeit obliquely. The cinema of attractions, for instance, is characterized by surprise over suspense as well as by an abbreviated temporality. This different kind of temporality is characterized not by evolution or unfolding but by "sudden bursts of presence" (Gunning [1989] 1995, 75–76). As films in this early period tend to be brief, over almost before they have begun, there would seem to be no chance for them to become anything else. Incidents occur but never add up. The tense of any one of these films, says Gunning, is the "pure present tense of its appearance" (77). Early cinema is quirky and jagged, not yet smooth, as Gunning suggests with his reference to the "jolts of surprise" (76) that characterize the cinema of the trickster Georges Méliès—the model, as it turns out, for his own formulation. *La fée aux choux*, in which the discovery of babies is "one, two, three," and it's over, would seem to further exemplify the "burst" temporality of the cinema of attractions. But this is not to say that it is *not* a narrative. Indeed, as Gunning usefully points out, it is a challenge to find moments in early cinema that show absolutely no inclination at all toward narrative (78). Thus, the enumeration of babies—the first, the second, and the unripe third—would need to be considered as a nascent narrative.[13]

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[13] It could be argued, on the basis of Gaudreault's understanding of the circular structure of a film like *L'Arroseur arrosé*, that a film in which two babies are found to be ready to

My readers may again be impatient. If *La fée aux choux* is not necessarily a narrative film, or is a less complete narrative, then why wouldn't it be a clear example of the cinema of attractions? And why not its first extant example? All evidence at this time points to Guy-Blaché's production as predating even Méliès's first attempt at filmmaking, now lost (McMahan 2002, 13). There are reasons, however, for not attempting to claim *La fée aux choux* for the cinema of attractions, even if we could. First, refusing to periodize the film as such calls attention to the question of periodization, especially knotty since the cinema of attractions, a "structural element" of early cinema in Gunning's terms, also "interacts" with narrative (Gunning [1993] 1996, 73–74). Charles Musser has argued that if there is a period dominated by the cinema of attractions, it is not Gunning's 1895–1906 but the novelty period, from late 1895 to 1897—only one year (1994, 216–17). Indeed, there is no real "period" here and no easy continuum.[14] Second, despite productive feminist work on early cinema that fills out the cinema of attractions—most notably work by Lauren Rabinovitz (1998) and Constance Balides (1993)—we still have reservations about this paradigm. Feminists have understood the cinema of attractions as peculiarly formulated in such a way as to exclude the female body, which, argues Patrice Petro, has historically been cinema's "main attraction" (2002, 171). In feminist theory, gender must figure; figures are gendered. But gender, Mayne noted early on, "was not a category" in the theorization of the cinema of attractions, despite the obvious use of the female body as attraction and the exhibitionism attributed to the attractions phenomenon (1990, 166). Clearly there is a tension between a feminist interest in looking to early cinema for confirmation of Mulvey's hypothesis regarding voyeurism and narrative and Gunning's interest in an alternative in the form of exhibitionism and not-yet-narrative moments. As Petro has recently pointed out, however, these two paradigms also share something crucial. Both the attractions and the narrative pleasure paradigms are deeply invested in the classical Hollywood narrative model (Petro 2002, 172). Both leave intact the argument that the early cinema

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pick and a third is put back to grow is less complete, or perhaps less symmetrically balanced, than *L'Arroseur arrosé*, where the waterer (the gardener) is watered by the waterer (the bad boy) who is in turn watered by the gardener. However, there is every indication that this is the structure of the second rather than the first version, which might well have been made after *La fée aux choux*

[14] Both McMahan (2002, 34) and Musser (1994, 217) argue that fewer, not more, films should be seen in the category of Gunning's "attractions."

of narrative integration that began so cleverly to cover its devices would become the Hollywood cinema we know today.[15]

Thinking about *La fée aux choux* as the beginning gives us a chance to imagine beginnings as well as to challenge them. Let us imagine starting from a somewhat different premise, recalling how earlier attempts to found a feminist theory on a critique of an objectionable voyeurism and an observed tendency to narrativize the female body produced a negative theory, however powerful.[16] Whereas Mulvey's feminist polemic was derived from an analysis of the cinema of Alfred Hitchcock and Josef von Sternberg, another, later feminist film theory might take its inspiration from the young Alice Guy's experiment in scenes for the camera. Here, I would stress her own innocence as well as that of her female character, for erotic sexuality seems out of place in this fairy story produced when Alice was only twenty-three years old.[17] The fairy's body is a clothed body, with long filmy drapery covering the legs and with waist cinched into the hourglass fashion of the period. The figure's graceful gestures might easily be justified by assumptions about dance and dancers prevalent at the time. The fairy moves for the camera, most likely in order to sell more cameras, cameras like the one used to shoot the scene. Perhaps most important, *La fée aux choux*, so early and so innocent of both sexuality and narrative, looks not so much forward to the origins of the classical as it does backward to the precursors of cinema.

The cinema of repetition
Looking back, let us try to imagine the cinema before attractions, to reduce the phenomenon to something even more fundamental, and to think pre-spectator as well as pre-story. For the theory of attractions carries

[15] An additional question is the degree to which the theorization of both the attractions and the visual pleasure paradigm provides for opposition or alternatives in the form of an avant-garde The difference between the two paradigms in this regard is significant, since while the cinema of attractions functions somewhat like an avant-garde practice, Mulvey has to posit a separate tradition of "radical" filmmaking that helps both to define classical Hollywood narrative and to keep it in check (1975, 18).

[16] Mayne observes the "increasing narrativization" of the female body (1990, 164) Williams finds in Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of the human body in motion a tendency that coincides with the "first halting steps toward narrative" (Williams 1991, 39).

[17] I take issue with McMahan, who finds that the movement of the fairy "displays her erotic charms" (2002, 22). Certainly, her flowing white dress is low cut, highlighting cleavage The costuming in this *La fée aux choux* compares interestingly with that in the later version, *Sage-femme de la première classe* (1902), where both the fairy and the mother are dressed more modestly in peasant-type dresses laced up the front.

with it always a theory of that curious theatrical spectator located in the public venue. The first viewers of *La fée aux choux* were not theatrical spectators but potential consumers of the Gaumont camera. And the theory of attractions assumes the spectacle-narrative paradigm that has not as yet been able to account fully for the integration and coexistence of the two within the same film. Furthermore, we need to counter the tendency toward seeing a continuum in which before there was narrative there were attractions; it is *not* that attractions simply came before narrative. Before there was narrative there was *repetition*. In narrative theory we come to understand repetition negatively, as what narrative is not. This not-narrative is there in Roland Barthes's essay on the structural analysis of narrative where the "first *form* given to man" is repetition (1977, 124). Repeated events do not constitute a narrative; a narrative sequence is "essentially a whole within which nothing is repeated" (Barthes 1977, 124). Then, as the sequence becomes narrative in form, repetition finally is "vanquished." It would seem that there is implied in this a paradigm for the not-quite narrative. Nothing quite transpires in the repetition of moves, gestures, and events. The opposition is between the sequence in which everything is repeated and one in which nothing is repeated, an anticipation of Barthes's "process of becoming" (1977, 124), the process that might become the ineffable chain of cause and effect in classical narrative.

My interest, however, is less in the origins of narrative than in what could be called the not-narrative—a concept different from the nonnarrative, which has had a long association with the avant-garde and a connection to radical politics. Focusing on the structure of repetitions in this moment has the historical advantage of reminding us that before story films there were series of views, and before views there were motion studies. Surely *La fée aux choux* is closer to these than to classical Hollywood narrative, for in it we can still see repetition at work: the again and again and the over and over. We are thus located in Musser's novelty period of cinema when exhibitors sometimes exploited the projection loop, the "repetitious quality" of which worked, he says, to "obliterate narrative" (1994, 216–17). Making Gunning's "simple" temporality of attractions—"now you see it, now you don't"—look complex, *La fée aux choux* is even more basically "now you see it, now you see it, now you see it" (Gunning [1993] 1996, 79). The machine-made repetitions and multiple frames that cinematically produce the multiple figures that, projected, give life to a dancing fairy and wriggling babies also constitute a visual curiosity. In sum, we do locate *La fée aux choux* within the short novelty period when attractions were undeniably ascendant. Repetition is

of course a cinematic attraction in and of itself. But repetition is that and more.

The question of the tensions between spectacle and narrative asks to be dealt with in another sense, in a philosophical sense that tells us how very much is on the line in the question of the metamorphosis of forms at this historical juncture. To this end, I have turned repeatedly to Gilles Deleuze's quarrels with the classical image of thought set forth in *Difference and Repetition* ([1968] 1994). Although Deleuze is most concerned here with rescuing the philosophical conceptualization of difference, I read him for what he has to say about the transgressiveness of repetition ([1968] 1994, 3). This is not to imply that we do not benefit as well from the theorization of the inextricability of difference and repetition, the way, as he says, that "difference inhabits repetition" (76).

Especially relevant are Deleuze's speculations about the theater of repetition as opposed to a theater of representation and the existence of the former as outside representation, where repetitive "vibrations, rotations, whirlings, and gravitations" escape signification ([1968] 1994, 9–10). Much much more is at stake, however. Deleuze, above all, is engaged in a revolt against classical philosophy, and for him overthrowing Plato requires "denying the primacy of original over copy, of model over image" (69). Resemblance, that with which the photographic is always plagued, is the stubborn insistence on the privilege of the preexistent model, which must be abolished so that "one can no longer point to the existence of the original and a copy" (69). And one takes him to mean that this also consequently involves a "glorification" of all means of repetition, replay, and reproduction (69). My inclination is to take inspiration from this appreciation of repetition, but with one caveat. It is well known that Deleuze proposes two kinds of repetition, interdependent and not separate: the first is the negative "repetition of the Same," and the second is the "affirmative" repetition, which is creative and imaginative and out of which change is produced (24). Where the two line up as exemplified by the "invariance" of the law and the variance of change (2), I follow his theorization. However, repetition in Deleuze also entails nonsubstitutable and nonexchangeable singularities (singularities with no equivalence). Here, I worry about the high-culture as well as the capitalist-market applications of singularity. My complaint is that any valorization of singularity seems at odds with the overthrow of origins, for singularity in the later stage of advanced capital in which we now live has become the basis for the privatization of culture. Why? As I have argued before, because, among other practices, copyright uses the singular subject as the wedge into ownership (Gaines 1991). The challenge to singularity as it

becomes originality—that is, the invitation to ownership—may be seen historically through the insistence on repetition, barely glimpsed in this shortest, earliest period of early cinema, 1895–97. For repetition is here transgressive, as it defies the accusations of theft that would become plagiarism.[18]

Consider the number of ways we have of referring to processes that are synonymous with but not necessarily reducible to a notion of copying: repetition, replication, reiteration, reduplication, revision, and reproduction. In how many ways in our daily existence do we use these words, prefaced by the Latin *re*, which has historically meant back or backward but increasingly means again, anew, or over again? The contingency of the production of novelty is contained here where we learn that backward and forward are synonymous and that to create is to repeat.[19] The language that refers to the production of things refuses to help us with distinctions that are next to impossible to locate. The paradox of repetition is that to remake is always to make, to reproduce is to produce. Increasingly, we cannot tell from looking at things whether they have been made or remade, produced or reproduced. Things are always second as soon as they happen anyway. The cinema of repetition is the mechanical cinema with its capacity for return and replay, of the multiple as well as for the multiple, the mass. This is the cinema underneath the cinema of singular authorship and narrative difference into which it has evolved, its transgressiveness still there, essentially built into the machine.

The originality of her repetition

A final issue that stands in the way of claiming *La fée aux choux* as either the first fiction or the first narrative film is perhaps the most fascinating of all, the question of repetition as it is held in tension with originality or authenticity. It would be possible, the makers of the first works soon discovered, to effortlessly reproduce—that is, to produce new works that looked exactly like the ones they had just made or that others had made before them. In the heyday of copying, Guy-Blaché learned by doing or by copying, as did everyone else (McMahan 2002, 23). The term *copying*,

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[18] In describing the way that repetition works against the law, Deleuze says, "If repetition can be found, even in nature, it is in the name of a power which affirms itself against the law, which works underneath laws, perhaps superior to laws" ([1968] 1994, 2).

[19] See Deleuze. "We produce something new only on condition that we repeat" ([1968] 1994, 60). This should not be construed, however, as "There is nothing new under the sun."

as we know, refers both to the attempt to completely remake as well as to reprint, as occurs in the photographic laboratory process involving image production from a negative. That both *to remake* and *to reprint* have come to be understood as forms of "copying" might at first engender confusion. But that is my point. I want to dramatize the ambiguity and expose the nonsensical logic of the authentic print. Recourse to the original is always stubbornly there in any notion of "having copied." As Rosalind Krauss reminds us, it is always the problem of the "emptying out" of authenticity in those media that are resolutely multiple to begin with (Krauss 1984, 14).[20]

Copying, whether undertaking a complete reproduction or just striking another print, was the rule of the day at the moment of the inception of cinema. For example, the film titled *L'Arroseur arrosé* is itself a copy of the earlier *Le jardinier* (1895).[21] The Lumière company had later copied *Le jardinier* as *L'Arroseur arrosé*, producing one of many reproduced copies, perhaps as many as ten, often by competing companies. Méliès, understanding a successful formula, also made *L'Arroseur arrosé*. Not surprisingly, even Guy-Blaché made *L'Arroseur arrosé* for Gaumont in 1898, producing what has been called an "exact copy" (McMahan 2002, 23, 253). My slippage from *copied* to *made* may not be obvious, so let me restate my point. It would be as easy (and as grammatically correct) to say that Guy-Blaché *made L'Arroseur arrosé* as it would be to say that she *remade* it. The difficulty lies in any assertion that the film is *produced* the first time and *reproduced* the second since, in fact, it is produced a second (or third) time as much as it is *produced* the first. To repeat myself: to reproduce is to produce. To remake is to make.

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[20] The reference is to the line so often quoted from Walter Benjamin: "From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense" (1985, 226).

[21] The several versions and as many or more titles for the Lumière film continue to cause confusion. In addition to *L'Arroseur arrosé* (The waterer watered), one finds *Arroseur et arrosé* (Waterer and watered), *Le jardinier et le petit espiègle* (A little trick on the gardener), and, in English, *The Sprinkler Sprinkled*, *Watering the Gardener*, and *Teasing the Gardener*. My survey of recent texts in English produced a surprising number of title variations as well. See, e.g., Williams 1992, 29; Bordwell 1997, 173; and esp. Musser 1990, 143, on the Edison remake, *The Gardener and the Bad Boy*. Jean-Jacques Meusy lists *Le Jardinier* as one of the ten films on the program at the December 28, 1895, premiere screening at the Grand Café, but the fact that it was soon after remade and titled *L'Arroseur arrosé* meant that the earliest title was eclipsed and the two extant versions of this film, one in which the boy is spanked as punishment and the other in which the hose is turned on him, are confused with each other (Meusy 1995, 21). See Aubert and Seguin 1996, 106–7, for the most complete information.

Now if remaking were the practice of the day, so was the reproduction of prints, that is, the production of positive prints struck from a camera-original negative. So the assertion that either *L'Arroseur arrosé* or *La fée aux choux* is the first *anything* becomes even more tenuous when we add to the question of "which remake" the question of "which print" counts as the version that we want to consider the first. Note the number of dilemmas we encounter. Let us state that Guy-Blaché copied *L'Arroseur arrosé*. Her very "making" calls into question the status of *L'Arroseur arrosé* as the first fiction film, because in making *L'Arroseur arrosé* she was making a version of a version of what was *thought to be* the first but may have been the second version or even the third of the gardener watered by a rascal.[22]

If the successful and popular film about a gardener watered was remade multiple times, it would make sense that a commercially successful film based on a well-known myth about where babies come from would also be copied. Many years later, Guy-Blaché recalled that she sold eighty copies of her first film about the cabbage fairy (McMahan 2002, 23). It is not completely clear, however, what she means when she says so many copies were produced. We assume that she means that prints were struck by the Gaumont company. But the language of the copy invites strange slippage. The fairy film was also "copied" at least once by a rival company, Pathé. In *Transformation* (1906), a female magician draws live babies out of garden vegetables and flowers as a kind of conjuring trick (Fischer 1979, 52).

If Pathé copied Guy-Blaché's fairy film in order to repeat its success, why wouldn't she copy herself? This practice actually epitomizes a prolific career in which she "copied" herself many times over. It is thus not surprising that in the case of the cabbage fairy, remade and reprinted multiple times, she might have become somewhat confused about which version was which. Many years later, in an interview for French television, she thus describes the story of what she says was her first film, *La fée aux choux*. It is, she says, a film about "two lovers who wanted to have a baby which they found among the cabbages" (*The Lost Garden* 1995). Clearly this does not describe the action in the extant copy we have been discussing, which features a single fairy and no childless parents. This does,

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[22] We could argue that the original negative from which the extant print of what we assume is *La fée aux choux* was struck predates the original negative of *L'Arroseur arrosé*. McMahan theorizes that there is a "strong possibility" that Alice Guy could have directed *La fée aux choux* with the 60-mm camera with which Gaumont was experimenting in 1896 (2002, 12–14). The fact that the 1896 film was most likely shot on 60 mm but the surviving print is 35 mm can be accounted for by the Gaumont company's later accommodation to the more commercial format.

however, describe her later *Sage-femme de la première classe* (1902), now understood as a remake of *La fée aux choux*.[23] The first film is "copied," as it were, with significant changes. The later film is composed of not one shot but two, one outside the garden gate and the other inside the garden. In the first shot, the fairy shows the couple a choice of dolls, none of which appeals to the young mother-to-be. In the second, inside the cabbage patch, the couple finds a suitable baby from among the "live" babies, and the male character hands money to the fairy. Alice Guy-Blaché, in perhaps the only extant example of her acting, plays the male lover. In a still from the film, she is shown affectionately placing something vegetable-like in the mouth of her female lover (fig. 2). Beyond the opportunity that the film provides us for an analysis of early cross-dressing and emergent lesbianism, it also furthers the problematic of the copy. It is a copy but not a copy. It is another *La fée aux choux* but not the *La fée aux choux*. It is a different repetition, a repetition with difference. It is an original copy.

Conclusion

There are two conclusive ways in which we can speak productively of the originality of her repetition, the apparent paradox seen in our understanding of the original copy. The first way of speaking takes us toward the more utopian possibilities of copying and replication and thence to the challenge that early cinema poses to theories of narrative; it also takes us to the opportunity cinema offers for probing the philosophical understanding of origins. The second approach makes the most of the thematic of the cabbage babies, for the originality of repetition is nothing more or less than a metaphor for human reproduction—the process by which we remake ourselves.

First: I have hesitated to claim *La fée aux choux* as a "first" because the original cannot be extricated from the copy; the first cannot be distinguished from the second. Seconds overlap with firsts; productions are on the heels of reproductions. The difficulty of naming the difference dramatizes the audaciousness of the claim that this film is the first. Its fictionality stems as much from the fictionality of originality as it does from its made-up status as a fairy tale. I would locate it not at a foundational beginning but instead in the realm of the over and over again,

[23] McMahan refers to a third in the "cabbage" series, *Madame a des envies* (Madame has her cravings), the title referring to the cravings of pregnant women (2002, 38–39). In this film a female character gives birth in the cabbage patch

Figure 2 *Sage-femme de la première classe* (Alice Guy-Blaché, 1902), a later version of *La fée aux choux* (The cabbage fairy) The male character (middle) is played by Alice Guy.

as able in its repetition to renounce its origin as it is to renounce the origin of all other contenders. As a fairy tale, the story of the cabbage fairy has been told countless times before. As a film, *La fée aux choux* has existed in many forms and in as many copies of copies, the existence of which in poststructuralist theory has been said to have confirmed a phantom original, the original being only the effect of its copies. In this essay, the evidence of the film's multiplicity (as well as the multiplicity of other early films such as *L'Arroseur arrosé*) is used to renounce the origin that can never be demonstrated definitively.

Second: Some will say that if I do not claim Guy-Blaché's film as the first fiction film I will have snatched the victory from a woman just when the process of historical rectification and reparation was about to award her for her achievement. In answer to this I would say that something larger can be claimed by a critique in the name of the feminism that has not only rewritten histories but toppled paradigms. The very idea that the first fiction film might not be a boy's masturbation metaphor but a film about "where babies come from" tips the scales for feminism.[24] It should be no surprise that some of the first work on feminism and film was interested in the conjurer in the films of Méliès and had as its thesis that the male magician's control of the woman stems from an anxiety about her potential powers. It would be woman's "procreative powers" that inspired the envy of men and caused the need to control and usurp those powers (Fischer 1979, 45). Although Lucy Fischer introduced the work of psychoanalyst Karen Horney on "procreation envy" into the field in an early article, the possibilities were never explored further, and the field quickly took her conclusions in the direction of the critique of male-dominated cinema.[25] But now the procreative function returns insistently. The fairy tale is not the "pretext" for technological attractions, as Gunning (1996, 80) finds it works in Méliès. The fairy tale is the key to the promise of new technologies. It tells the story of how the new moving picture machine effortlessly reproduces multiple babies as if by magic. It illustrates the mimetic powers of mechanical reproduction by itself mimicking the repetition function of mechanical reproduction by which figures are "brought to life."

Human reproduction is after all the strangest of all repetitions. Andy Warhol comments on this strangeness in one of his audacious remarks: "When I look around today, the biggest anachronism I see is pregnancy. I just can't believe that people are still pregnant" (1975, 118). There is, then, one last way in which mechanical repetition is transgressive. It gives us a vision of the world in which things are miraculously reproduced without either the insemination of or the gestation within the female body. Noticeably, the cabbage patch euphemism that replaces biological preg-nancy and childbirth substitutes for them a utopian wish. The utopianism is here the vision of regeneration that, controlled by women, circumvents the old womb mode of reproduction. The wise woman or midwife of

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[24] See Musser 1990, 143, for readings of *L'Arroseur arrosé* from a phallic point of view, which notes the position of nozzle and hose and suggests that the scenario could be read as representing pleasure in as well as punishment for masturbation.

[25] For the relevant 1926 essay, see Horney (1926) 1967

Sage-femme de la première classe, it is important to note, does not deliver the young couple's baby. They do not have to go through all that at all. The midwife merely plucks the baby from a cabbage and sells it to them.

I began by saying that I wondered what film history would look like without recourse to the first time. In the process of writing, I fell back on the concept as much as or more than I refuted it but discovered in the process something different. What I discovered is that "firstness" and its concomitant, "origin," are almost automatically challenged by the very possibilities of mechanical reproduction where reproducing is indistinguishable from producing. The implications for feminism and film history are multiple, the most important being what it is that feminism, with its legacy of change and overthrow, contributes. We draw from feminism here not an inevitability of the sexualized female body but another approach to human and mechanical reproduction, as if to say that there are metaphors that film feminism has not exhausted. To reconceive of what it means to conceive is a feminist project, but not because women have been eternally linked with conception. It is a feminist project because we might never have looked at the problem of origins and repetitions in this particular way if it had not been for gender, and gender gives us a political explanation for the exclusion of the work of Alice Guy-Blaché from the canon as well as the rationale for its inclusion.

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Judylyn S. Ryan

Outing the Black Feminist Filmmaker in Julie Dash's
Illusions

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Feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels—sex, race, and class, to name a few—and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires.
—bell hooks 1981, 194

n the years since Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) was first released, the film has come to occupy a place of honor as an emblem of Black women's admittance into the realm of mainstream cinema in the United States.[1] Toni Cade Bambara has described it as "an historical marker" for both the Black independent cinema movement and Black women's cinema ([1993] 1996).[2] Aside from its status as the first feature

[1] Dash was not the first African American woman filmmaker to produce a feature-length film Several Black women preceded her, most notably Kathleen Collins, whose feature film *Losing Ground* (1982) was crafted for, but did not gain, theatrical release. Leslie Harris's *Just Another Girl on the I.R.T* (1992), Darnell Martin's *I Like It Like That* (1994), Kasi Lemmons's *Eve's Bayou* (1997), Maya Angelou's *Down in the Delta* (1998), and Gina Prince-Blythewood's *Love and Basketball* (2000) are some of the films that followed *Daughters* in gaining theatrical distribution.

[2] Since the term *Black* refers not simply to color/race but to cultural identity, it is capitalized throughout this article As W E B. DuBois first noted, and as legal scholar and critical race theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw has observed more recently, the noncapitalization of *n* in *Negro* and subsequently of *b* in *Black* dates back to the slavery era when, "in defense of slavery, the use of the lower case 'n' became the custom in 'recognition' of Blacks' status as property" (Crenshaw 1988, 1332) The current protocol of preferring capitalized spellings of *Jewish*, *Hispanic/Latino*, and *Native American* while reserving a lowercase spelling for *black* Americans attests to the longevity of racist indoctrination

film by an African American woman director to be theatrically distributed, *Daughters of the Dust* is widely regarded as the model—thematically and technically—for Black women's cinema. While the film clearly merits this distinction, Dash's earlier work, *Illusions* (1982), offers a more complex vision and theoretical analysis of Black women's cinema, of the responsibilities and challenges confronting Black women in the contemporary filmmaking industry, and of strategies for negotiating these. No other Black woman's film offers as insightful and expansive a view of the political vision informing Black feminist filmmaking.

Illusions begins with a long shot of an Oscar statuette glimmering in the dark and a female voice-over, echoing Ralph Ellison's 1949 essay, "The Shadow and the Act": "To direct an attack upon Hollywood would indeed be to confuse portrayal with action, image with reality. In the beginning was not the shadow, but the act, and the province of Hollywood is not action but illusion" ([1953] 1994). We then see a montage of documentary footage from World War II, followed by visuals of a film studio over which is superimposed the title "Hollywood 1942." Dash thereby opens with three separate registers that together make up the complex narration of this film: the disembodied female narrator who blends the voice of the film's main character, Mignon Duprée (Lonette McKee), with the thoughts and assertions of its director, Dash; documentary film footage clearly referencing history, the "act" to which the voice-over refers, and its illusory shadow on film; and, finally, Hollywood in 1942, the industry producing such "illusions." In order to get at the complexity of this structure, I take "Hollywood 1942" to signal the beginning of a film within the overall film titled *Illusions*.

The film "Hollywood 1942" begins with a male voice-over identified as that of a character, Lieutenant Bedsford (Ned Bellamy), dictating a communiqué to his secretary. The subsequent story focuses on a light-complexioned Black woman, Mignon Duprée, who passes for White and is employed as a producer at National Studios. Events in the film within the film unfold during the course of a single day at the studios where Lieutenant Bedsford is stationed as a consultant on behalf of the Office of War Information and where Ester Jeeter (Rosanne Katon), a Black singer, finds occasional employment providing the vocal accompaniment to the visual performances of White female movie stars, such as Lila Grant (Gaye Kruger). The main order of business for the day is trying to avert a financial disaster following a technical mishap that has left the audio reel for Grant's latest film out of sync with the video reel. Since Grant is on tour with the United Service Organizations (USO), Mignon is given the task of turning this technical disaster into a "top moneymaker." This

precipitates her encounter with Ester, who is hired to rerecord the sound for Grant's performance.

Although *Illusions* focuses on a Black woman passing, passing is not its only trope. Equally important to its analyses are the tropes of (un)masking, closeting, and outing. The film's fluctuation between the tropes of closeting and outing parallels its oscillation between masking and manifesting, between mask and manifesto. In its exploration of these discursive valences, *Illusions* functions as a manifesto that unmasks the role of "state power" in underwriting Hollywood narratives, deposes the White male gaze that dominates film spectatorship as well as genre and production conventions, and offers a view of what I call a *democracy of narrative participation*. This term enhances the discursive and theoretical potential of the word/concept *democracy*, whose original impetus—as articulated in the U.S. Declaration of Independence—was human rights and, linked to this, the rights to representation and participation. While these rights have been given extensive consideration in relation to structures of governance and electoral processes, Dash's film feminism suggests that a genuine commitment to democracy requires, among other things, representation and participation in national cinema and national history. With *Illusions*, Dash outs herself as a Black feminist filmmaker with a distinct style, vision, priorities, and commitments.

Democracy and narrative participation

> Participation matters, after all. . . . Participation among and with others offers more than simple survival. It nourishes and reinforces both the individual and the community. . . . And democracy demands the ability to participate, the opportunity to act in close association with others, and the right to a hearing.
> —Lani Guinier 1998, 18

Of the many commitments Dash embraces in *Illusions*, perhaps the most significant is her commitment to exploring and expanding the narrative responsibilities of democracy. Dash foregrounds her critique of the construction of "democracy" and "history" in Hollywood narrative with the opening reference to Ellison, her voice-over narrator grappling with the problem of how to mount "an attack upon Hollywood" for its role in perpetuating undemocratic representational practices that endorse White supremacist ideologies. Given Hollywood's role not as originator but as imitator/distributor, and its operation not by action but by means of

illusion/projection, how does one successfully challenge its hegemony, reverse or curtail its disabling effects? Dash deciphers and answers Ellison's riddle by providing a film manifesto that unmasks the "state power" projected through Hollywood cinema even as it makes use of classic cinema conventions.

As the film within a film progresses, we observe Mignon's efforts to persuade National Studios chief executive, C. J. Forrester (Jack Radar), that the public is ready for a new type of film, one that deals with the war's effects on the average citizen; her commitment to ensuring proper working conditions and a just remuneration for the Black vocalist, Ester; her struggles to balance her identity in and responsibility to Black and national publics with her role and responsibility in the (ideologically) White world of "Hollywood 1942"; and her attempts to avoid Bedsford's unwelcome sexual pursuit. Two related events prompt a somewhat unexpected resolution. Mignon's conversations with Ester allow her to fully evaluate the self-censorship imposed by her masked identity. Shortly thereafter, Mignon's Black identity is unmasked, which forces a declaration of her own counterhegemonic vision of, and role in, the filmmaking industry. The film's ending discloses the "autobiographical" design in *Illusions* when Mignon, ventriloquizing Dash, proclaims her new determination to "use the power of the motion picture."

While *Illusions* does not fuse the identity of the actual filmmaker (Dash) and the fictional filmmaker and narrator (Mignon), the closing scene consolidates the internal and the external signification of the narrative. It reveals the parallel visions and concerns of the filmmaker within the film and the filmmaker outside the film. Indeed, in tracing the process of Mignon's transformation from simply desiring change to consciously pursuing it, the film both critiques the Black woman filmmaker's assigned position within that arena and formulates a public declaration of her intention: to "stay right here and fight" because there are "many stories to be told and many battles to begin." Mignon's closing declaration of her interest in stories whose inclusion promotes a more democratic cinematic praxis and of the importance of the ideology embedded within historical representation prefigures the theoretical direction taken by Dash in later works (including *Daughters of the Dust* [1992]) and by other Black women filmmakers, most notably Yvonne Welbon and Cheryl Dunye. Like *Illusions*, both Welbon's *Remembering Wei Yi-Fang, Remembering Myself* (1995) and Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) retheorize the dialogic relationship between the past and the present as it influences the space of Black women's creativity. In their fashioning of narrative techniques, these Black women filmmakers illustrate the relevance of Barbara

Christian's (1987) concept of narrative theorizing to the analysis of African American cinematic narratives.

In "The Race for Theory," Christian provides an important interpretive paradigm for evaluating Black women's literary narratives when she notes that "our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create . . . since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" (1987, 52). Christian's analysis dismantles the divide between theory and performance, suggesting that works by Black women artists perform theory. *Illusions* performs theories about Black women in the film industry by exploring their various roles as musical props, disembodied voices, and would-be producers. Like that of other Black women artists, Dash's theorizing unfolds through the use of narrative techniques that underscore the parallels between the artist and her protagonist, thereby suggesting the former's occupation of several discursive positions at once. Prominent among these techniques is her use of the vocabulary of silence.

As a filmmaker, Dash does not simply depict or acknowledge silence. Rather, she uses camera work to enunciate silence in order to demonstrate its discursive efficacy.[3] In *Daughters of the Dust*, for example, she uses the silent vocabulary of embrace, touch, and gaze to narrate the lesbian text of Trula and Yellow Mary's relationship. Given the film's 1902 setting, to have done otherwise, to have allowed a verbal narration of this "visual subplot," would have misrepresented the discursive constraints on lesbian experience.

Toni Morrison's (1985) analysis of the critical content of Black women's silence and their discursive relationship to "civilization" clarifies the significance of silence as an expressive modality in Black women's art. In evaluating Black women's silence, Morrison identifies it as a meaningful, in fact eloquent discourse, undergirded by an epistemological standpoint that has the potential to challenge, expose, and nullify hegemonic discourses: "In your silence, enforced or chosen, lay not only eloquence but discourse so devastating that 'civilization' could not risk engaging in it lest it lose the ground it stomped" (1985, 230). This assessment sheds light on Dash's choice of discursive strategy for her film feminism—her effective deployment of a preexisting hegemonic silence for a liberating project. In *Illusions*, Dash provides a filmic rendition of the vocabularies of silence. She strategically manipulates the hegemonic institutional silence

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[3] Zeinabu irene Davis's feature film, *Compensation* (1999), and Afro-British filmmaker Maureen Blackwood's *Home Away from Home* (1994) are two impressive examples of this cinematic use of the vocabularies of silence.

on the treatment of racial minorities through a seemingly casual framing of shots that gesture toward another subtext—at the margins—in the form of studio posters, such as one for the 1941 musical *The Chocolate Soldier*. Given this film's focus on a Russian soldier, its placement here signifies on the absence of film narratives about Black/"chocolate" soldiers. Such shots provide tellingly ironic commentary on undemocratic practices in "Hollywood 1942." In enunciating the marginalized analyses of various communities of the silenced and the silent, Dash—like other Black women artists—reveals the power of silence and the interpretive and epistemological agency of those communities.

Given its ideological objectives and its reliance on silence, *Illusions* does not (need to) assign Black subjects to an ahistorical prominence in "Hollywood 1942." In fact, despite Dash's highly touted casting of Mignon Duprée as a "studio executive," Mignon's executive status is still subject to gender and other ideological restrictions. Although she exerts some influence in her negotiations over Ester's wages, Mignon does not—as one might wish or expect—have the power to approve film projects dealing with new topics.[4] However, while her executive power is limited, the power she claims and shares with the camera is not. Mignon's discursive agency enables her to assist the camera by exposing and interrogating the regime of closeting responsible for both the pattern of "structured absences" (Snead 1994) and her own recourse to passing in "Hollywood 1942." In fact, Dash's exploration of passing is designed to reveal and foreground its relation to systemic failures of democracy, not to the psychological failure of a single alienated consciousness.

Outing the self

> It was she who helped me see beyond the shadows dancing on a white wall . . . to define what I had already come to know, and to take action without fearing.
> —Mignon Duprée in *Illusions* (1982)

In U.S. cinema, passing is usually the narrative trope chosen for a frantic flight away from Blackness and from the social, economic, and political

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[4] In her analysis of *Illusions*, Patricia Mellencamp describes Mignon as "powerful" and as having "status and influence at the studio." However, Mellencamp later concedes that "like so many women in Hollywood, what she really wants she is unable to get—film projects of her own" (Mellencamp 1999, 101).

subordination reserved for racial minorities. Films such as *Imitation of Life* (1934) and *Pinky* (1949) depict passing as a (futile) means of escape from what the central characters (initially) perceive as a disabling identity and of accessing otherwise restricted socioeconomic opportunities. Making the assumption that passing is the film's primary trope, Saidiya Hartman and Farah Griffin argue that "the climax of Julie Dash's *Illusions* occurs when the White Lt. Bedford [*sic*] exposes the racial identity of the beautiful passing heroine Mignon" (1991, 362). In fact, however, the climax in this encounter is not Bedsford's exposure of Mignon's racial identity but Mignon's outing of herself.

The film registers its lack of interest in Bedsford's exposure through the fact that it generates no penalties, sanctions, or other adverse consequences for Mignon. To the contrary, the event culminates with Mignon sitting down in the studio chief's chair. Dash also diminishes the significance of Bedsford's discovery by allowing Mignon to out herself in an earlier phone conversation with her mother. In fact, Dash has Mignon progressively out herself through the photo of her fiancé, her speech inflection, her gesture, and a gaze that invites Ester's and the viewer's discovery. Dash's decision to film Mignon's conversation with her mother as a de facto soliloquy, without the standard shot–reverse-shot, heightens its importance as a declarative event. By themselves Mignon's words express this declaration only in part. The scene's full meaning emerges through the silent vocabulary of the mise-en-scène and camera work. Pointedly avoiding a close-up of Mignon's face, the camera notices then slowly zooms in on a small sign pasted to the wall of the phone booth that reads, "I am so an American!" Here Dash employs (and inverts) the discursive symbol and space of the closet (the phone booth) for a formal outing of Mignon's Black identity and her political vision while affirming and insisting on the citizenship and participatory entitlements these would otherwise preclude.

In her astute reading of the passing narrative in film and literature, Valerie Smith describes it as a genre that "manipulates spectatorial allegiances" by designating the passing individual's implicit desire for social equality as a betrayal of his/her race. Smith's observation that these narratives are "sites where anti-racist and white supremacist ideologies converge" (1998, 36) reveals a key motive for Dash's revision of the genre—to undo or refashion the terms and effects of this convergence. In particular, Dash's characterization of Mignon Duprée follows a very different trajectory than typically occurs in passing films by White directors. Here, Dash represents passing as Mignon's strategy for accessing power on behalf of various constituencies, including Black people, Black women, Native

Americans, and White boys. Furthermore, unlike standard cinematic representations of the passing individual who suspends or severs her/his group affiliation and who hides her/his connection to Black people as a shameful secret, Mignon maintains important emotional, cultural, and sociopolitical connections to family members and to other Black people. This depiction is an original and compelling variation on the motif of passing that can be read as an exploration of the closeting that occurs when Blacks and other racial minorities gain admittance to "ideologically White" institutions.

Being closeted is traditionally regarded as a self-selected positioning on the part of those individuals who lack the safety, support, consciousness, or courage to claim an othered, discredited, marked identity. As a corollary to being closeted, coming out typically signals a voluntary and conscious self-disclosure, while outing is typically understood as the intentional (and politically motivated) disclosure of someone else's othered identity. In *Illusions*, Dash offers a more expansive way of understanding closeting and the act of outing the self.

Although the vocabulary of closeting and outing is almost exclusively applied to lesbian, gay, and bisexual experience, these terms can apply more broadly to a range of subaltern subjectivities. In a monological (and therefore undemocratic) social order, identities, experiences, choices, and commitments beyond the single "preferred" option are always already othered, excluded, marked, closeted. (Here I use the term *preferred* in the sense that Stuart Hall uses it to mean endorsed by, and supportive of, hegemonic interests [1977, 341].) To the extent that the single "preferred" option is assumed to represent "everyone," being closeted—having one's identity, experience, choice, or commitment excluded—is never self-initiated. Rather, being closeted is a preassigned subject position. In response to this a priori assignment, one can acquiesce, remain in the closet, and try to pass; or one can covertly resist and mask within the closet; or one can openly resist and out oneself by an explicit contradeclaration. As a presumably transparent and overdetermined subjectivity, race—and specifically "non-Whiteness"—is thought to be incommensurate with the discursive valence of the closet. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues in *Epistemology of the Closet*, "Racism . . . is based on a stigma that is visible in all but exceptional cases" (1990, 75). While Sedgwick's analysis is generally accurate, racism can and does generate a structure of relationships that constitutes a form of closeting. Underlying the admittance of racial minorities to "ideologically White" institutions is the assumption that they share the same goals, desires, and beliefs as traditional members, and that despite continuing group vulnerability to the ravages

of White supremacy, individuals admitted will make no fundamental chal-
lenges to the institution.[5] Thus, unless it commits to redefining itself, an
"ideologically White" institution that admits racial minorities implicitly
closets them by its a priori expectation that they will and must embrace
the same concerns, interests, attitudes, priorities, and agenda as those held
by its traditional members, even as it "welcomes" them. Tiger Woods's
early career on the Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) tour is
instructive.

When Woods, whose mother is Asian American and whose father is
African American, won his first Masters tournament in 1997, he was given
the customary honor of selecting the menu for the following year's Cham-
pions' Dinner. Senior PGA golfer "Fuzzy" Zoeller's warning that Woods
had better not select "fried chicken . . . or collard greens or whatever
the hell they serve" did not simply disparage traditional African American
cuisine but also implicitly cautioned that in granting him admittance to
this "ideologically White" institution, the professional golf community
expected Woods to uphold and not challenge or transform its traditional
identity and behavior. His "race," not his particular cultural experiences,
values, commitments, choices, or perspectives, would suffice to indicate
that this sports institution was now transformed and more inclusive. While
closeting Woods, the institution used his racially marked presence to mask
what James Scott calls its "hidden transcript" (1990, xii)—its continuing
investment in the institutional attitudes, behavior, and agenda ostensibly
disavowed by his admittance. Woods's response to Zoeller's warning—he
selected hamburgers—can be read as a de facto decision to pass by ac-
quiescing to the institution's simultaneous welcoming and closeting of
him.

By contrast, the campaign strategy used by Barbara Jordan (1936–96),
the first African American elected to the Texas state senate (1966–72) since
Reconstruction and who later served in the U.S. Congress (1972–78),
provides a good example of masking within the closet of race. When Jordan
first ran for public office, she made a conscious decision not to include
photos of herself in campaign ads. Given the intensity of anti-Black racism,
Jordan chose to mask behind the "preferred reading" of her name as
"White" to assist voters in seeing her candidacy in terms of the political
issues at stake and not in terms of race. However, in her subsequent actions

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[5] The term *ideological Whiteness* comes from Toni Morrison's analysis, in "Unspeakable
Things Unspoken," of the nineteenth-century formation and "successful assertion of white-
ness as ideology," that is, the concept of "racial superiority, of Whiteness as privileged place
in the evolutionary ladder of humankind" (Morrison 1989, 16–18)

as a legislator, Jordan clearly demonstrated that her political vision was shaped by an awareness of Black women's history and that she had no interest in masking as a strategy for participating in the ideologically White institutions of the Texas state senate and the U.S. Congress.

The monological expectations that motivate the closeting of racial minorities can persist even in progressive settings, as Audre Lorde's critique of 1980s White feminist attitudes indicates. In "Age, Race, Class, and Sex," Lorde observed that "by and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist" (1980, 116). Significantly, *Illusions* was produced at the very moment that Lorde and other Black feminists were interrogating and rejecting many of the monological assumptions underlying White feminist praxis. Expectations of, and demands for, a homogeneity of experience, perspective, style, and commitment function as a mode of closeting against which Black women artists have vigorously asserted themselves.

Outing the self is thus an important act of self-definition and self-empowerment for Black women artists. In the early years of her literary career, for example, Nobel laureate Toni Morrison was adamant in rejecting the closeting implicit in evaluations that her writing was "like" the single/"preferred" model of literary greatness—White men. In an interview with literary critic Nellie McKay, she insisted, "I am not *like* James Joyce; I am not *like* Thomas Hardy; I am not *like* Faulkner. I am not *like* in that sense. I do not have objections to being compared to such extraordinarily gifted and facile writers, but it does leave me sort of hanging there when I know that my effort is to be *like* something that has probably only been fully expressed perhaps in music, or in some other culture-gen that survives almost in isolation because the community manages to hold on to it" (McKay 1983, 426). In this interview and in numerous other interviews and essays, Morrison made a concerted effort to out herself in order to create discursive and social space for her literary performance to be received on its own cultural terms. Of her many nonfiction works, the essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" (1984) offers perhaps the most extensive articulation of the cultural paradigm informing her literary vision. With *Illusions*, Dash creates a comparable vehicle for outing herself as a Black feminist filmmaker and for articulating her own distinct cultural commitments, experiences, and vision.

Although Mignon does not initially reject the closeted position to

which she is assigned, she does envision changes in both the film industry and the larger society after, and because of, the war. As she explains in the phone conversation with her mother, "I want to be part of that change. If they don't change in this industry. . . . Well, I don't think they're going to change at all." Mignon's interest in participating in change reflects a characterization that conforms more precisely to the trope of masking than to the trope of passing. Indeed, Dash redefines passing as a form of masking.

As both an African American survival strategy and an artistic trope, masking involves the deliberate projection of a duplicitous external illusion in order to conceal a different internal reality that, if it were known, would jeopardize the individual's or group's survival or well-being. Its development and deployment by African Americans invariably coincided with situations that were patently undemocratic and that were shaped by cultural and political hierarchies, beginning with slavery, and as existed, for example, in "Hollywood 1942" and other spheres of American public life. As a discursive strategy fashioned for a mixed social milieu, masking insulates (necessary) communications from discovery in the presence of hostile and powerful others. A form of cultural literacy, masking involves the encoding and decoding of meaning so that two or more layers of signification are simultaneously available to culturally literate or knowledgeable recipients. While the mask functions as a double-voiced or polyvocal signifier for the culturally literate, for those not versed in the tradition it is a reassuringly transparent and univocal signifier. As a form of literacy, masking requires and encourages participants in the discursive community to develop an interpretive praxis that seeks meaning beyond surface levels of signification or, more specifically, that seeks additional levels of signification in any communication event. It presupposes—but does not guarantee—that outsiders will not detect secondary/subtextual communications and that knowledgeable/intended recipients will.

In creating a protagonist who initially masks in the ideologically White world of the film industry in order to access power on behalf of various constituencies, Dash reveals her interest in exploring the strategies and consequences involved in adopting a counterhegemonic stance and outing the self in such a setting. Mignon's encounter with Ester and her final confrontation with Lieutenant Bedsford mark the two phases of her self-outing. Her conversation with Ester initiates the process. As a first step, Mignon acknowledges the side effects of masking: her "mask" has atrophied, has become, in essence, a univocal/monological signifier because of her inability to define and implement autonomous objectives, and, as a prolonged activity, masking inevitably perpetuates the censor-

ship of the closet. This conversation therefore serves as the catalyst for Mignon's recognition of her own shadow role in "Hollywood 1942" and her formulation of a plan to "take action" by facilitating her own self-exposure, self-interrogation, self-recognition. The event therefore demonstrates the importance of Black women's discourse to their psychological and professional well-being. In Ester's presence Mignon is able to confront the reality of her own liminal presence and the risk to her psychological health from her acquiescence to the ideological demands of being closeted. She later asserts that her conversation with Ester helped her "to define what I had already come to know and to take action without fearing." This statement suggests the extent to which the absence of like-minded colleagues denied her the opportunity to engage in a critical dialogue about her experience, her actual role, and her potential agency within the hegemonic environment of Hollywood. Dash's depiction of the dialogue between the two women exemplifies Patricia Hill Collins's observation that "while domination may be inevitable as a social fact, it is unlikely to be hegemonic as an ideology within that social space where Black women speak freely. This realm of relatively safe discourse, however narrow, is a necessary condition for Black women's resistance" (1991, 95).

Mignon completes the process of outing herself in her final encounter with Lieutenant Bedsford. In this outing, she critiques and repudiates the socially and psychologically debilitating practices of the filmmaking industry and announces her intention to become a participant equal to Bedsford in that industry. As she sits in the studio chief's chair, her dialogue becomes a voice-over soliloquy that speaks back to the voice that opened *Illusions*. That is, it projects Mignon's declaration out of the narrative of "Hollywood 1942" and into the present of 1982, the year Dash made the film. The portrayal of Mignon's fear and her loss of vision identifies and negotiates one of the many dangers confronting Black women closeted in the contemporary filmmaking industry. In creating a protagonist for whom being closeted undermines the potential social benefits of entry into and participation in this ideologically White institution, Dash suggests that claiming transformative agency requires not only admittance to hegemonic institutions but also an outing of the self. The film transcends the Black woman's isolation by imagining and engaging a community of women filmmakers and by exemplifying the type of critical praxis that would enable them to define and pursue a self-empowering vision. As Mignon acknowledges in her soliloquy, the conversation with Ester rekindled her confidence to "use the power of the motion picture" to develop the liberating changes she envisions despite—and also because

of—her awareness of the ways in which the cinema's culturally hegemonic practices endanger the national public.

Illusions, the manifesto

> The manifesto marks the gap between democratic ideals and modern political practice. . . . At the same time, however, the manifesto promulgates the very discourses it critiques: it makes itself intelligible to the dominant order through a logic that presumes the efficacy of modern democratic ideals.
> —Janet Lyon 1999, 3

In its attention to the responsibilities of democracy, *Illusions* functions as, and claims for itself the status of, a manifesto.[6] As a manifesto, *Illusions* demonstrates Dash's counterhegemonic vision through its redefinition of the narrative (and ethical) responsibilities of democracy as well as through its explicit critiques of the failures. The film also refashions classic Hollywood cinema conventions to advance new and transformative objectives. In this regard, Janet Lyon's analysis of the manifesto as a form that "exposes the broken promises of modernity" (1999, 3) is especially useful for interpreting Dash's filmic exploration of the broken promises of U.S. democracy. As Lyon explains, the manifesto "makes itself intelligible to the dominant order through a logic that presumes the efficacy of modern democratic ideals" (1999, 3). Thus, like other manifestos, *Illusions* employs a rhetorical strategy that "promulgates the very discourses it critiques." Significantly, Dash's critique of Hollywood filmmaking practices is wholly dependent on the logic of "modern democratic ideals," and the emphasis throughout the film is on the ethical, sociopolitical, representational, and narrative imperatives of democracy.

Not only does *Illusions* conform to Lyon's description of the manifesto's discursive dynamic, it also advances what Sidonie Smith identifies as the "six constituent aspects of manifesto": "to appropriate/contest sovereignty"; "to bring to light, to make manifest"; "to announce publicly"; "to perform publicly"; "to speak as one of a group, to speak for a group"; and "to speak to the future" (1998, 435–38). The significance

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[6] As a participant in the "L.A. Rebellion" involving members of the Los Angeles school of Black cinema, Dash critically interrogates the disabling conventions of classic Hollywood cinema, laying the foundation for this discursive praxis (Masilela 1998).

of the film's function as an autobiographical manifesto is suggested by Smith's observation that "through the manifesto, the autobiographical subject confronts the ghost of the identity assigned her by the old sovereign subject" (S. Smith 1998, 435–36). For Mignon, perhaps the ghost of an identity reappropriated and made manifest by Dash, that assigned identity/position is in the closet. Through the manifesto, Smith continues, "the autobiographer purposefully locates herself as a subject leaving behind the object status to which cultural identities have confined her" (1998, 436). Although *Illusions* cannot be considered "autobiographical" in the sense of recounting Dash's individual experience, it both constitutes and is informed by Black women's (collective) social biography. The parallel between Mignon's and Dash's visions recalls Jacqueline Bobo's comment that a "congruence between the personal histories of filmmaker and subject is a predominant feature of black women's biographical documentaries" (1998, 9). According to Bobo, the Black woman filmmaker's focus on this congruence is meant to "illustrate how both filmmaker and artist have overcome obstacles to create art that is meaningful for black audiences" (1998, 9).

As a manifesto, *Illusions* can also be compared to other declarative texts by Black women filmmakers that explicitly reject the closet in favor of a formal outing of the self within the field of filmmaking. Alile Sharon Larkin's essay "Black Women Filmmakers Defining Ourselves" (1988), Davis's essay "Woman with a Mission" (1991), and Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) are obvious examples.[7] The affinities among these self-declarative texts are largely occasioned by the ubiquity of contemporary closeting regimes. Like *Illusions*, Larkin's and Davis's essays and Dunye's feature film also make challenging U.S. history and Hollywood filmmaking the precondition for enacting their Black feminist film praxis. Paving the way for this later work, *Illusions* critiques the ways in which these twin sites of oppression support what Wahneema Lubiano describes as "a profound violation of the spirit of democracy" (1997, vii). At the same time, the film reaffirms and reinscribes Black women's (future) agency on those very sites by inverting and redeploying classic cinema conventions. In so doing, Dash reveals that U.S. democracy, like the film project the Black woman producer Mignon must work to salvage, is an illusion whose sound reel (its rhetorical claims) is out of sync with its video reel (its ongoing institutional practices).

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[7] Larkin's feature film, *A Different Image* (1982), can also be considered a self-declarative text. Its focus, however, is on images of women in the lived public arena, especially the space of public consciousness, not the film industry

Figure 1 Lieutenant Bedsford (Ned Bellamy) and Mignon Duprée (Lonette McKee) in *Illusions*. Courtesy of Women Make Movies.

Unmasking "state power"

We are overseas defending some kind of a democracy that doesn't even
exist at home!
—Mignon Duprée in *Illusions* (1982)

While there are many sites of contestation in *Illusions*, the central conflict
enacted on screen is between Mignon Duprée and Lieutenant Bedsford
and their respective functions as narrators (fig. 1). Mignon, the initially
disembodied female narrator who opens *Illusions* and then "finds" her
voice through the story of her character in "Hollywood 1942," faces off
in the final scene with Bedsford, the male "voice of God" narrator who
opens "Hollywood 1942" and whose voice and authority are progressively
contested and overridden by hers. The conflict between Mignon and Beds-
ford serves several purposes. First, it confirms Dash's interest in exploring
the role of what Lubiano calls "state power"—represented by Bedsford,
the military consultant—in its "ideological warfare" against the national
public. Lubiano cites Timothy Mitchell's (1991) definition in identifying
the "state" in "state power" as both the system of formal government
and the "common ideological and cultural construct [that] occurs not

merely as a subjective belief, incorporated in the thinking and action of individuals [but] represented and reproduced in visible everyday forms'" (Lubiano 1992, 327).

Applied to the context of "Hollywood 1942," "state power" includes Lieutenant Bedsford's specific role as propaganda consultant on behalf of the government as well as the articulations of "state concerns and interests" by National Studios. In having Mignon explode, not to the studio chief but to Bedsford, "Your scissors and your paste methods have eliminated my participation in the history of this country, and the influence of that screen cannot be overestimated," Dash levels her critique at the state power in whose service Hollywood filmmaking is deployed.

Illusions further unmasks the role of state power in Hollywood versions of U.S. national history by interrogating the relationship between film illusion and the illusion of democracy. It thereby takes on the manifesto's primary function as precursor text and catalyst for the revision of national history because it insists on an interrogation and recasting of assigned roles. As Lyon (1999) notes, manifestos do not dismantle the discourse, they participate in and expand it. In Lieutenant Bedsford's communiqué at the beginning of "Hollywood 1942," he lauds the fact that with "its manpower and vast material resources . . . the motion picture industry is privileged to stand in the very forefront of the united American endeavor" to "meet the totalitarian challenge to the democratic way of life." Coupled with Bedsford's comments about the "motion picture's essentiality" and its "broad sphere of service to the war," the documentary war images seen in the beginning of the film underscore the relationship between the war machine and the Hollywood machine. These images point to the ideological function of Hollywood filmmaking and unmask the many battlefronts on which the motion picture industry wages ideological warfare.

Dash's critique of Hollywood's role as a primary distributor of national history is pointedly set at "National Studios." Her objective is not (simply) to debunk "preferred readings" of "Hollywood 1942." Rather, she exposes patterns of denial, projection, displacement, and rationalization, and the latent desires—psychological and ideological—that undergird them. Through its intratext, *Illusions* positions itself within the genre of national history in order to disrupt that history's monocultural hegemony. Thus, even as it appears to conform to them, *Illusions* exposes and challenges several trends in Hollywood cinema that together erase Black people's social presence and/or sanction their subordinate social status. As an example, Dash casts only two Black characters and no Native American characters in the film. While the film does not, for the most part, violate

contemporary Hollywood filmmaking formulas in terms of racial casting, it succeeds in filling the parameters that this casting establishes with both the illusion and the "truth" it negates. African Americans and Native Americans are not simply absent from "Hollywood 1942" and the narratives produced there. Rather, as testimony to Lyon's claim that "the manifesto marks the gap between democratic ideals and modern political practice" (1999, 3), their absence is marked and interrogated throughout the film.

While Hollywood films have traditionally permitted the controlled "presence" of a few Black actors as supporting props rather than human subjects, *Illusions* exposes the presence of Blacks not as screen stars but as workers: the janitor glimpsed in the opening sequence and the singer/day laborer, Ester, who is barred from union membership, and its benefits and protections. By exposing the undemocratic treatment of Black subjects in "Hollywood 1942," *Illusions* reveals both the mechanism by which "structured absences" occur and the motivations behind these absences. Moreover, in revealing both the African American and the Native American contributions to the war on behalf of a democracy "that doesn't even exist at home," the film simultaneously unmasks "the ideology of Whiteness" and manifests the paradoxical truth of a "united American endeavor" in World War II. For National Studios to depict African American and Native American participation in this war "on behalf of democracy" would be to link, imagistically, the undemocratic treatment of Europeans under Nazi occupation and the undemocratic treatment of non-White peoples in White America. Such a thematic montage would constitute an unprecedented critique of the contradictions between the nation's foundational vision of human equality and its equally foundational practice of inequality. In simultaneously referencing African American and Native American participation in the war and the deliberate erasure of those contributions, *Illusions* invites such a critique with Mignon's outburst that "we are overseas defending some kind of a democracy that doesn't exist at home."

The film exposes the complex mechanisms used to ensure the (visual) illusion of cultural homogeneity—executive decisions that mandate the dismissal of narratives about Native American radio operators as "mumbo jumbo," despite a U.S. Office of War Information bulletin lauding their strategic importance since they can "send and receive messages in a code the enemy is unable to break"—and the erasure of conflict, even when that conflict is as benign as the struggle of "the average [White] citizen" to come to terms with the effects of the war. These mechanisms ensure that the patriotism and participation of Black and Native American soldiers

are expunged and that the devastating "effects of war on the average [White] person" are censored in favor of "upbeat" narratives glamorizing the heroism of the "[White] boy next door." And, most important, these mechanisms endorse the commodification of Black culture through the parodic appropriation of Black dance and musical forms and the widespread use of disembodied Black voices that "pass" for White. (The negotiations over Ester's salary remind us that her vocal talents—packaged as White—are in "great demand.") The movies produced by this machinery create a monolithic narrative whose primary goal is to uphold the illusion of a culturally homogenous, uncontested, and already attained democracy.

Deposing the White male gaze

> The "gaze" has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally.
> —bell hooks 1992, 116

> It is after all only a matter of time . . . that after filming the point of view of the colonizer or the conqueror, cinema would eventually film that silent look which, until then, the camera had excluded from the sight of the good conscience of the colonizer.
> —Alain Ménil 1992, 158

In addition to facilitating an exploration of the ways in which "state power" is channeled through Hollywood, Mignon's conflict with Lieutenant Bedsford is structured so as to depose the classic cinematic gaze— the White male gaze. Through this contestation—suggested by their competing roles as external and internal frame narrators—*Illusions* deposes Bedsford's gaze sexually, ideologically, psychologically, and cinematically.

In her analysis of the ways in which Black people have traditionally resisted the White male gaze, bell hooks notes that "critical, interrogating Black looks were mainly concerned with issues of race and racism. . . . They were rarely concerned with gender" (1992, 117–18). Her assessment suggests some of the ways in which Dash's Black feminist gaze is unusual. First, contrary to the precepts of classic Hollywood cinema, the gaze and face that Mignon regards—almost longingly—is Ester's. As hooks observes, "The bond between [Mignon] and the young black woman singer Ester Jeeter is affirmed by caring gestures of affirmation, often expressed

by eye-to-eye contact, the direct unmediated gaze of recognition" (1992, 129). Ester's gaze humanizes Mignon by registering her full identity and by questioning her actual motives for being in the film industry. Its most visible effects are psychological and ideological. Under the scrutiny of the Black female gaze, Mignon achieves critical self-consciousness. By contrast, Bedsford, the would-be suitor, does not achieve the centrality or suave persona that the classic cinematic gaze usually confers. Dash discredits his sexual attitude and the gaze that informs it through her protagonist. Mignon's rejection of Bedsford's gaze is total. In their first on-screen encounter she tells him, "I'm not interested in you, or anything you have to say." His sheepish response, "I'm not the enemy," is deeply ironic. The camera's framing of the "blonde bombshell"—Forrester's secretary—further attests to Dash's deconstruction of the White male gaze. Although the blonde's provocative hip-swinging walk is meant for the consumption of the White male gaze, the camera relegates that reaction to the periphery. Instead, it frames a reaction shot of Mignon and Ester's laughter at the "bombshell's" swish. While this laughter exposes the performance, it also attests to Ester's and Mignon's shared ways of reading that, based on common experiences, constitute a shared epistemology.

Dash's portrayal of the demeanor of the "blonde bombshell" and other White women employed at National Studios also critiques the construction of White women by the White male gaze. As aspiring copies of the glamorized, objectified, and infantilized screen star, Lila Grant, the women internalize and reproduce the definition of womanhood posited by Grant's screen image as a being whose performance of self must be shaped for a phallocentric gaze. While it is possible to read the spectacle of a languid Grant intravenously feeding on Ester through the sound apparatus as parasitic, this event also reveals the enlivening potential of Black women's voices.

Second, while the White male gaze—Forrester's and Bedsford's—ignores the war's impact on the society at large, the Black female gaze—specifically Mignon's—acknowledges its psychologically damaging effects on "little boys" and on "the average citizen." That is, the Black female gaze notes and exposes the ways in which the White male gaze endangers White males through the packaging of film narratives that glamorize war while suppressing the truth about the psychological trauma it inflicts. In her reading of *Illusions*, hooks claims that "the film does not indicate whether . . . Mignon will make Hollywood films that subvert and transform the genre or whether she will simply assimilate and perpetuate the norm" (1992, 129). While one might question Mignon's (although not Dash's) ability to develop the cinematic strategies to support a transfor-

mative vision, hooks's question about Mignon's intentions is perhaps based on an assumption that Mignon shares the ambivalent and assimilationist stance of the traditional passing protagonist. In fact, *Illusions* provides extensive evidence of the transformative vision of Mignon's Black feminist gaze. A constant theme in Mignon's conversations with Forrester is the need for a type of representation that would respond therapeutically to the psychological needs of a country experiencing the losses of war: "We should be the first studio to give the public situations and characters that they can recognize as part of their own lives."

In staging its deposition of the White male gaze, *Illusions* uses many of the stylistic elements of film noir, a genre prominent in the 1940s. Through the use of black-and-white cinematography, low-key (and low-budget) lighting, mirrors, and the glass-paneled door through which silhouettes appear, the mise-en-scène conveys a sense of repressed consciousness through the ubiquitous presence of shadows.[8] Since noir techniques are frequently used to suggest psychological dualism or conflict, one might assume that Dash's usage of these techniques must refer to Mignon's psychological state as a Black woman passing for White. These cannot, however, be assigned to Mignon, since she displays no signs of conflict about her identity or her commitment to her cultural community. Instead, they mirror the conflict between Hollywood's—and the nation's—assertion of democratic ideals and its undemocratic representational practices. The place, Hollywood 1942, as character, is unmasked through these film noir techniques.[9] Ester's emergence from the darkness of the recording studio and Bedsford's unexpected emergence from the shadows with two cups in his extended hands (as Mignon moves to get coffee for herself and Ester) are typical examples of this emphatically shadowed mise-en-scène. Sometimes, as in the case of the footage in which Lila Grant gives her first performance, the shadows have distinct shapes. In that scene, the shadows of the White actors mimicking instrumental

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[8] While critics have complained about low-budget effects in *Illusions*, Dash's genius in crafting a plot that makes use of low-budget elements—black-and-white cinematography, low-key lighting, and so on—demonstrates her artistic versatility.

[9] Dash's use of film noir techniques to reveal the institutional setting as a determinant of actions and options constitutes a form of what Bambara calls "spatial narration" ([1993] 1996). Bambara describes spatial narration as a discursive strategy for exploring institutional causes. She notes that the exploration of space coincides with and supports the rejection of a related film ideology, one that emphasizes individual/psychological causes rather than systemic or institutional/ideological ones. By contrast, the exploration of space in Black independent filmmaking supports a representation of space as context—institutional context—in addition to deconstructing domination ideologies.

performers symbolically represent the Black musical foundations of this White entertainment product. In sum, these techniques are used to represent Black people's hidden contribution to Hollywood and to the progress of the nation-subject as well as the hidden collusion of "state power" in underwriting Hollywood narratives.

The film's third and most significant strategy for dismantling the White male gaze is Dash's construction of Mignon's and her own discursive agency. Over the course of the film, Mignon's voice and ideological analysis move from a marginal space, that of a disembodied female narrator implicitly positioned outside the dominant narrative and sociopolitical text, to one where she is directly involved in the film text of "Hollywood 1942." This progression, this transformation of the status of Mignon's voice, both challenges and subsumes Bedsford's voice and his authority. In *Illusions* Dash does more than expose the illusions behind Hollywood filmmaking. The title shot of an unraveled film reel bearing the word "Illusions" acknowledges that all filmmaking is a projection of illusions. That judgment applies to Dash's own work as much as it applies to Hollywood filmmaking. For example, when Ester performs to match the lip movements of the White actress, Lila Grant, on screen in the studio, a carefully timed extreme close-up of Rosanne Katon (the Black actress who plays Ester) reveals that she too is lip-synching and that *Illusions* too is a projection. Dash's decision to have Katon lip-synch to a recording of jazz great Ella Fitzgerald attests to the deliberateness of this gesture. This exposure of the filmmaker's/camera's discursive agency is emblematized in a series of alternating shots in the recording studio. A triple montage captures the projection of the White actress, Ester singing in the dimly lit studio, and the mirror image of the White technicians manipulating vocal/visual illusions under the metacritical gaze of the Black woman producer.

The anachronistic turn of events that follows the disclosure of Mignon's identity provides another occasion for Dash's unmasking of the film's construction. Bedsford's expected denigration of Mignon is "limited" to a comment that "You're not the same person you were this morning." Given his prior sexual interest in Mignon, and the sociopolitical context of the 1940s, the expected avenue for plot development would be a depiction of new jeopardies concomitant with the disclosure of her identity as a Black woman.[10] Instead, the discussion between the two adversaries

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[10] This avenue of plot development is exemplified in *Pinky* (1949). As Elspeth kydd notes, "when Pinky is revealed to be black she loses rights over her own body" (kydd 2000, 104) White men who claim the honor of "protecting" (policing) White womanhood also claim the duty of preying on (policing) Black womanhood

centers on the political implications of Mignon's role as a Black woman with executive status in an industry whose power is literally mightier than the sword. Although Bedsford hastens to tell her, in a pre-McCarthyist gesture, "Nothing's changed here. Nothing's changed except you," Mignon assures him, "From now on I'm here for the same reasons that you are." While it unveils the filmmaker's discursive agency, this denouement also affirms Mignon's and Dash's future agency. The closing shot of a Black woman in the director's chair dissolves the frame and moves the action out of "Hollywood 1942" to 1982 and beyond.

Dash's self-conscious unmasking of the film's construction serves several purposes. These and other similar metacritical devices prevent the viewer from becoming immersed in the world of the film. They disturb. In so doing, they remind us that "Ester" is an actress portraying a role and that this too—but from a different ideological position—is not "reality." Recognizing that the filmmaker is not concerned with creating/maintaining the illusion of reality, the viewer is able to consider other possible objectives and motivations behind filmmaking. New interpretive possibilities, a different kind of "truth," emerge from the viewer's awareness of how persons and events are positioned onscreen and why. In fact, the deliberate exposure of the film's illusions allows the viewer to see the portrayal not as transparent "reality" but as negotiated "truth." Dash suggests that there are modes of representation that—because they do not acknowledge themselves to be representations—prevent the exercise of interpretive agency and foster the misleading equation of fact and truth, portrayal and reality. The narrator's (and Ellison's) observation that "the province of Hollywood is not action" can be understood to mean that Hollywood denies the viewer agency, the ability to take action. A subsequent exchange between Ester and Mignon accentuates this critique of Hollywood filmmaking. Explaining her interest in making movies, Mignon confides, "I overheard a producer talking, blasting a movie critic, he said, 'History is not what really happened, even if it's written in a book. The real history, the history that most people will remember and believe in, is what they see on the silver screen.' I wanted to be where history is being made." *Illusions*, then, remakes "Hollywood 1942." Moreover, in exposing the negation and restructuring of not only the African American presence but also the Native American presence, Dash signals her feminist commitment—in this and other works—to breaking out of the confinement of a binary analysis of racist discourse to reveal other constituencies affected by, and implicated in, the practice of cultural hegemony.

Coda: The Black feminist gaze in focus

> I had always considered myself one of a community of some very talented, powerful women filmmakers.
> —Julie Dash 1992, 26

> As independent Black women film-makers, we actively create new definitions of ourselves within every genre. . . . We hope that with our films we can help create a new world, by speaking in our own voice and defining ourselves. We hope to do this, one film at a time, one screening at a time, to change minds, widen perspectives and destroy the fear of difference.
> —Alile Sharon Larkin 1988, 172

Illusions accomplishes several important goals. As a manifesto, alternating among the discourses of history, logic, and prophecy, it recasts Black women's vocal contribution to American film history, measures the cost and terms of that participation, imagines expanded roles and greater agency for Black women in film, facilitates Black women's self-empowerment through film, and, in encouraging new modes of critical viewing, provides a new paradigm for constructing interpretive agency. In its depiction of the vision orienting Mignon's future film praxis the film speaks for and to a community of Black feminist filmmakers. It asserts that, whether in front of or behind the camera, a Black woman in Hollywood is likely to be welcomed as a new prop, assigned a position of illusory agency, and closeted in a new form of ideological and cultural invisibility, unless a historicized consciousness leads her to out herself by fully enunciating her presence, position, and potential on the battlefield. Through such independent self-representation, however, Black women filmmakers can engage cinema not only as a site of struggle but also as a site of transformation on which to redefine and enact the narrative responsibilities of democracy.

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Frances Negrón-Muntaner
Rita Gonzalez

Boricua Gazing: An Interview with Frances Negrón-Muntaner

orn into a family of academics in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Frances Negrón-Muntaner is fearless when it comes to traversing disciplinary boundaries in her work, moving skillfully from experimentally infused documentaries to journalistically enhanced academic writings. Negrón-Muntaner's cinematic and textual explorations map the contours of the Puerto Rican diaspora, from Jennifer López's butt (Negrón-Muntaner 1997) to the Janus face of what she terms *ethnonational shame* and its counterpart, pride (Negrón-Muntaner 2004). She fleshes out these *boricua* (the Taíno word for "valiant people," used to name the ethnonational subject) anatomies in her book *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture* (2004), a historiographic project that simultaneously embraces and unpacks Latino/a popular culture.

Negrón-Muntaner became entranced with the seductive powers of image making at an early age. She produced the films *AIDS in the Barrio: Eso no me pasa a mí* (1989), *Brincando el charco: Portrait of a Puerto Rican* (1994), *Puerto Rican ID* (1995), *Homeless Diaries* (1996), and the forthcoming *Regarding Vieques* (2005). She utilizes the sites of writing and film/video production to examine the complex dynamics of ethnonational pride and shame as they are performed and regulated in public and private spaces. Her approach draws on queer theory, cultural studies, and feminist theory, always with an oppositional politic. Her roles as writer and media maker, shifting according to context, have taught her that the "bottom line . . . is practices and effects, not 'identities'" (Juhas 2001, 285).

Rita Gonzalez (*RG*): You're a filmmaker and academic scholar, a screen-

writer, poet, and journalist, and you also cross all sorts of disciplinary lines as well. How do you negotiate what might be seen as the "discontinuity" of all your "boundary crossings," and how does this affect your film-making?

Frances Negrón-Muntaner (*FNM*): This discontinuity is a source of both creativity and despair. But I am comforted by the thought that this despair is as much a resource as it is a hindrance. I am also not alone. These in-between spaces are shared by many other people (artists or not), those of us living on the edge between the "native" neighborhoods we grew up in and the metropolitan cities of our adulthood, the carefully drawn academic disciplines that we learned in school and the chaos of contemporary experience, our grand dreams and the multiple limitations that ultimately shape our lives. So, ultimately, the truth is fairly ungla-morous: I can't help it.

With the exception of one of my new films, *For the Record* (2003), about the Chamorros' (native people of Guam) World War II experience, my entire cinematic production to date has looked into what constitutes Puerto Rican culture in the United States. And what brought me to the seemingly very faraway shores of Guam was an investigation into the impact of the Spanish-American War, which made Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines U.S. territories. In this sense, my interest in Guam also stemmed from a desire to continue thinking about the discontinuities of contemporary "territorial" experience. And I am underscoring this term, *territorial*, because the Chamorros of Guam and Puerto Ricans are not immigrants or postcolonial peoples. We embody another location—colonial migrants—one that is rarely recognized, much less engaged with.

It is also often the case that I approach a question across various dis-ciplines. For instance, my interest in spectacle, the complex space of seeing and being seen that has been part of my last two books, *Boricua Pop* (2004) and *None of the Above* (2005), is also an important element of one of my new films, *Regarding Vieques* (2005). This film is a chronicle of the Vieques anti-Navy movement, partly as a televisual political phe-nomenon and partly as a battle of fictions over definitions of nationhood, national security, and citizenship. By "battle of fictions" I mean that fic-tions like the Latino voting bloc in the United States became a formidable opponent to the fiction of American national security. It's riveting.

RG: As an articulation of Puerto Rican performance, can you talk a bit about your notion of "the spectacle of Vieques as short-lived tele-

novela" wherein the inhabitants of Vieques were a "cast of (uncredited) thousands" who "came to watch the spectacle, came to be the spectacle"?[1]

FNM: Did I say that? Well, Vieques is a remarkable case study of political spectacle on many levels. Consider that Vieques has no movie theaters, even though Puerto Rico is an image-saturated culture. So, when the Vieques protests became a mass media phenomenon after the death of security guard David Sanes inside the Navy's shooting range on April 1999, the small island became a stage and the stars themselves came down from the sky to perform Vieques for a global audience. Consider also that Puerto Ricans have never won a battle as a "nation" against U.S. imperial rule, much less against the symbol of imperialism itself in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Navy; that this battle was televised blow by blow; and that the Puerto Rican press explicitly told viewers that "we"—reporter/spectator—were going to win!

RG: But what was there to win?

FNM: The *viequenses* had very specific demands—an end to environmental harm, better infrastructure, and return of expropriated land. Those that came to support the *viequenses*—politicians from Puerto Rico and the United States, the celebrities—had the effect of rendering the various struggles as entertainment and the locals as extras in a movie whose ultimate message was *nosotros podemos*—we can do it, we are the protagonists in our own soap opera. Not surprisingly, once most *boricuas* "succeeded" in showing the world that the Puerto Rican nation had the power to win over the U.S. armed forces, Vieques as televised melodrama came to an end. Yet the *viequenses* still have most of the problems that they had to begin with, and most celebrities are not going to find it sexy to fight the Department of the Interior or the Wildlife Refuge—particularly after the cameras have left the area.

The way that the saga ended also made evident how even when Puerto Ricans were arguing in nationalist terms, the context was transnational, a constant concern in my political writings about Puerto Rico. The Vieques dispute was ultimately not solely "won" by *boricuas* on the island but by the perceived power of Puerto Rican and other Latino voters in the United States. Without dismissing the decades that went into obtaining the exit of the Navy in Vieques, the televised version of the Vieques struggle strengthened the illusion that the Puerto Rican nation won Vieques and

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[1] Personal correspondence between Rita Gonzalez and Frances Negrón-Muntaner, March 2003.

that the power dynamics between island Puerto Ricans and the U.S. governing elites changed. But did they?

RG: Some of these concerns are present not only in your film but also in your book *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of American Culture* (2004). What's the argument there?

FNM: *Boricua Pop* aims to understand why and to what effects attempts to socially value ourselves as Puerto Rican ethnonationals have so frequently been staged through spectacles to offset shame. In bringing up shame as a matter of public concern, I am not of course arguing that every instance of *boricua* exchange can be primarily explained by shame. I am arguing that modern Puerto Rican ethnic and national *identity* has been historically staged by tropes of shame and displays of pride—not unlike Vieques.

RG: Ethnonational shame and pride derive from conditions of visibility and spectacle. How does the situation of "looking and being looked at" (Juhasz 2001, 281) that you consider in relation to *boricua* gazing differ from the binary that instigated feminist film theory?

FNM: Feminist film theory has often underscored the vulnerability of those who are being looked at in relation to those who are doing the looking. To the extent that Puerto Ricans are represented as "feminine" in the public sphere when we are visible, there are many points of contact between my project and feminist theorization. Yet my trouble with gender is that I can't see it that straight. When one pays attention to multiplicity, the place of gender is relativized. Gender, class, and race can never be separated when theorizing "any" bodies, much less ethnic ones. To assume this challenge, for instance, I experimented in *Boricua Pop* with several ways of addressing the simultaneity of a gendered, racialized, and class-specific location in concepts such as "racially engendered." I also underscored how, for instance, Madonna is a different "woman" when consuming the ethnic other on the U.S. stage than when she is upholding *boricua* queerness on a Bayamon one.

There is also another point of friction that I tend to have with some feminist academic culture. Certain ambivalences and interests that are dubbed—not to say demonized—as "masculine" I find to be constitutive. I despise war yet I am fascinated by it—as evidenced by my two films on the relationship of war and U.S. territories. I reject male authority yet I am drawn to positions of power—I lead groups, organize events, try to influence policy. Of course, so do many feminists, but very rarely does one hear feminists admitting to the contradictions inherent in our practices. So, the whole truth is that I am a bad feminist subject.

RG: So, as a "bad feminist subject," perhaps you could map out meth-

odological concerns—of how you are taking up cultural studies, post-colonial theory, queer and feminist studies in *Boricua Pop*.

FNM: I am more drawn to the gesture of queer theory than of feminist theory, perhaps because queer theory is less regimented as a theoretical practice, more unstable as a discipline, and by definition difficult to normalize. I am also not afraid to slip conceptually, to be found theoretically lacking, to let language seduce me into inconsistency. Theory for me is not a place to be whole, perfect, or flawless. On the contrary, it is a stage on which to exhibit our lacking selves—all of them.

Regarding specific bodies of theory, I am closest to cultural studies precisely because in practice it is interdisciplinary and sometimes even antidisciplinary. I have productive conflicts with postcolonial theory, beginning with its designation. In most of my work, for instance, I actually examine a colony that if included in much of postcolonial analysis would pose critical theoretical challenges to it. Not only is colonialism not in the past, temporally "post," there are people that have repeatedly chosen to remain a colony over other formal decolonizing options, complicating the matter politically. In addition, I think that it is counterproductive to cite theory that is produced in relation to a different context, say, India, as "evidence" in another context, such as Puerto Rico. I think conceptual borrowing and comparative study are extremely conducive to sharpening analysis, but we can't just "copy" it.

RG: Shame, as you are using it, attends to multiplicities in spectacle, as well as to not seeing gender "straight." With regard to the latter, how have you determined what is useful in the varied queer discourses on shame?

FNM: Methodologically, *Boricua Pop* looks at the most conspicuous of Puerto Ricans—movie stars, artists, and entertainers—to see how their bodies are being shown and showing off. Through collecting the detritus of mass culture, the book pieces together the public biographies of cultural performers to behold not only the role of shame in constituting *boricua* identity but also how seeing and being seen contribute—or not—to its attenuation. In retrospect, I see that I could have also looked at sports stars, crowds, and other moments of spectacularization, such as the activism of the 1970s in New York, but at the time my main concern was with pop culture figures that were largely understudied yet were a common cultural reference among Puerto Ricans everywhere. My work as a filmmaker was also veering more in the direction of fiction, so I was increasingly interested in stars—how they are constructed and how they give body and/or deny voice to Puerto Rican spectators.

In addition, it is important to underscore that the specific ways that

boricuas have been constituted by shame are not the same. The shame of
the privileged, for instance, tends to be performed as "disgrace-shame,"
a sense of having done wrong by not living up to their own anticolonial
principles, and/or being confused with Puerto Ricans of a lower status
by others deemed equal or superior (more often than not, white Amer-
icans). The shame of the *boricua* majority (popular) is associated with
what Carl D. Schneider calls "discretion-shame," an affect that delimits
sacred spaces that are proscribed to us not only as Puerto Ricans but also
as workers, blacks, women, queers, and/or migrants (1977, 20). In mak-
ing use of queer studies here, I often find the surface effects more pro-
ductive than the core.

   RG: That's an interesting turn of phrase. What are the "surface effects"
that attract you?

   FNM: The surface is made of the various textual inconsistencies around
a matter. The core tends to be about what these "really" or ultimately
mean. As the core will, by necessity, be eventually declared void, it is the
surface matter that often becomes more valuable to readers over time. In
other words, I did not read Nietzsche for the "truth" about shame but
to examine the line of inquiry, how he went about it. Also, to the extent
that I can theorize queerness apart from other processes of subjection,
queer theory alone is not as useful as an integrated analysis in which one
does not take any single "identity" as an absolute center. In *Boricua Pop*,
for instance, when writing about performers Holly Woodlawn or Mario
Montez, I found queer identity a less productive category than the ap-
preciation of queer performativity on a much broader stage.

   RG: What drew you to Woodlawn and Montez?

   FNM: Ever since I saw Holly Woodlawn's performance in *Trash*, a
1970 film by Andy Warhol, I wanted to write something about her, par-
ticularly because she had been inexplicably ignored by Puerto Rican schol-
arship. In Woodlawn's performance, I found a space to think about eth-
nicity and shame, a relationship that I find so critical to understanding
the perhaps twisted pleasures of *boricua* performativity. In walking on the
wild side, I also encountered Mario Montez and became very intrigued
by the fact that several observers underscored the beauty of Woodlawn
and Montez's performance styles. Although both were framed in the con-
text of camp practices, I think that their style was even more complex. It
merged a number of practices that included camp but also *gufeo*, a verbal
exchange where puns and linguistic dexterity often serve to make fun of
the incongruous. This was not camp as defined by queer white men but
a related sensibility that many clearly saw as a cultural resource, without
quite grasping the difference.

Specifically, I think that the wit of queer Puerto Ricans combined a sense of ethnic and sexual exteriority that was "intellectual" in the sense that it assessed the social as a comedy, but it was also "heartfelt," seeking connections to the audience. In fact, Jack Smith and Charles Ludlam (1992) particularly liked Mario Montez because he was successful in immediately eliciting the sympathy of the audience. This was also Woodlawn's strength and what she wanted to achieve as a performer. At the same time, the fact that queer audiences admired these performers did not reconfigure the shame of their social identities. For Smith and Ludlam, Puerto Rican drag performers were still objects to be used and recycled as needed to enhance their own art. This was double-edged for Puerto Rican performers: they wanted to be "aesthetic outlaws," yet by remaining "objects" they never acquired the dignified status they so intensely sought.

RG: In *Boricua Pop*, you also critically assess the field of "shame studies." I am curious about your framing of shame as constitutive of social identities generated by conflict within asymmetrical power relations, not privatized pathologies. I think I might side with sociologist Jack Katz's (1999) formulation of shame as "personally and historically contingent."[2]

FNM: I think that both formulations are compatible in one sense. In the Puerto Rican case, the embodiment of and discourse on shame/pride as a constitutive part of a public identity emerge from specific and changing social, historical, and political conflicts in a colonial context. Shame is, then, historically contingent. Concerning the "personal" aspect of Katz's definition, I was definitely cautious in my wording because there is a substantial body of work about Puerto Ricans that basically suggests that the group's "failings" (poverty, colonialism) are the product of our individual lacks, a move that contributes to constituting Puerto Rican subjects in shame. Another consideration is that while in some queer writings shame is very personal and private, in the Puerto Rican case it has been played out in public, aimed at the American gaze, at once benevolent and loathsome.

Furthermore, although I agree that the shame of *boricua* identification is experienced at a "personal" level, shame is constitutive of Puerto Rican subjectivity to the extent that Puerto Ricanness is a public and collective identity. While modern Puerto Rican ethnonational identity is not a simple effect of colonialism—understood to encompass not only political domination but also economic restructuring, interclass conflict, and symbolic violence—as a socially meaningful sign, *boricuaness* has been constituted through and from these constraints. In other words, *boricuas* do not freely

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[2] My thanks to Vivian Sobchack for recommending the author.

choose to affirm themselves as Puerto Rican, American, and/or Latino; they are, as sociologist Kelvin Santiago-Valles writes in his book *"Subject People" and Colonial Discourses*, "the effect of a subjection much more profound than themselves" (1994, 53). Santiago-Valles's book is, in fact, one of the few theoretical texts that challenge the otherwise popular notion that Puerto Rican national "identity" is a transhistorical social fact.

RG: Well, you do in fact go on in *Boricua Pop* to discuss shame as "bodied." Is there a way to deal with the complexity of shame's location both on the body itself and on the ethnonational body?

FNM: Shame lodges in bodies; in that sense it can only be narrated or staged through the subject. In honor of this, *Boricua Pop* includes a section in which I look at critically exposed body parts such as Jennifer López's butt and Ricky Martin's hips. But when shame is constitutive of an ethnic group, of the group's poetics of identification, we are faced with a different object than that of queer theory. For instance, it is the queer subject, rather than the gay community, that is most frequently the subject of shame. In the Puerto Rican case, it is the *boricua* subject as part of a colonized group that is constituted in shame by symbolic, economic, and racist violence. The theoretical challenge is how to understand the relationship between Puerto Rican subjects—in their heterogeneity—and the process of subjection that makes us "all" Puerto Ricans.

RG: Going back a minute, what do you mean by a "poetics of identification"?

FNM: I am referring to the symbolic repertoire available to a specific group as it struggles to fashion and reproduce itself as such. This repertoire is neither arbitrary nor infinite, and I believe it is quite vulnerable to power (dis)locations. For instance, over at least the last decade, new generations of upwardly mobile Puerto Ricans in the United States are increasingly representing themselves as Latinos or as Americans of Puerto Rican descent. These identifications demand a different poetics of identification.

RG: Is a *boricua* poetics present in *Brincando el charco* (1994), your first experimental film narrative?

FNM: Yes and no. Curiously, my own film work to date has been antipoetic in this sense. Most of my films resist the ways that majority Puerto Rican culture represents itself through mass media. My films, for example, do not represent cultural heroes nor are they comforting to spectators seeking relief from "American" culture. As the protagonist of some of these films, I am an "unrepresentative" subject on the axis of sexuality, gender, and migratory history. Yet to the extent that *Brincando el charco* was openly and ferociously engaged with hegemonic nationalist discourse, it is part of a nationalist debate and arguably did not transcend

it. In addition, I feel this film is flawed in at least two other ways—first, it is too invested in "representing" multiplicity rather than allowing it to be particular, and second, it is too invested in fortifying the "I" of the triply subaltern subject instead of engaging with the flesh of shame itself.

RG: Speaking of "the flesh of shame," Puerto Rican literary scholar Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes recently wrote an open letter to Douglas Crimp critical of the invisibility of race and ethnicity (and colonialism) in Crimp's "Mario Montez, for Shame" (2002).[3] How do you envision your own historical/theoretical project in regard to both queer and feminist notions of shame?

FNM: You have hit somewhat of a sore spot. I am the type that rarely enters a debate uninvited. Yet, when I read Larry La Fountain-Stokes's letter, I could not help but respond. After doing some homework, including looking at the site that listed the "Gay Shame" conference's overwhelmingly white participants and reading Crimp's text, I wrote a letter to the organizers, in which I basically argue that it is impossible not to speak of ethnonational shame when assessing the shame of Mario Montez's performance.[4] This was even evident to Montez's contemporaries, including Ludlam, who once commented that Mario was the first Puerto Rican performer to know that he was Puerto Rican and use it.

Importantly, Montez performed for Andy Warhol at a time when Puerto Ricans were represented as, literally, the garbage of New York City. Let us not forget that the first community action that the Young Lords undertook in New York was to pick up the garbage from the streets because the authorities refused to. Examples of the low symbolic capital attached to Puerto Ricans also abound in Warhol's *Diaries*, edited by Pat Hackett (1989). In fact, everything trashy, ugly, or "primitive" became Puerto Rican for Warhol in the 1977–85 period. Buildings were ugly because they were painted in "Puerto Rican colors" (320). People were ugly because they looked "Puerto Rican and Cuban and South American" (241). Ultimately, Puerto Ricans stood in as a sign of absolute otherness and barbarity, as when Warhol comments on how angry he became when a Puerto Rican family just watched as the neighborhood garbage went up in flames. Given this context, how could one address the shame of Mario

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[3] Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes's open letter was circulated via e-mail among a host of Latino scholars. It has not been published

[4] "Gay Shame. An International Conference at the University of Michigan" took place March 27–29, 2003, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor For more information see http //www umich.edu/~lgqn/gayshame.html. Frances Negrón-Muntaner's letter was not published.

Montez without taking into consideration his subjection as a Puerto Rican? It seems impossible to me.

RG: Although Crimp attempts to follow Eve Sedgwick's axiom that "people are different from each other" (Crimp 2002, 57), or in his words claim the "ethical necessity of developing finer tools for encountering, upholding, and valuing other's differences" (57)—he seems to go on to formulate that all (queer) shame is the same.

FNM: Absolutely. Crimp's essay also has another quality that disturbs me—the repetition of "poor Mario" as a chorus that underscores that the writer is looking at Mario from a white shaming gaze. The color blindness of so much queer theory is to a large degree what makes it thorny for my own work. And here I have to underscore a very different position than the one found in Crimp and other (white) theorists regarding shame.

As contradictory and productive as shame can be, being socially constituted by shame is not desirable for most people who are so hailed. Yes, shame is culturally "productive." But I find the narcissism that shame brings forth politically problematic, especially if one becomes enamored of it. In this regard, I would never advocate a politics "for shame" that desires Mario Montez to be sacrificed to the aestheticization of white queer shame. It seems to me that only relatively privileged folks can advance this proposition, people who have not been able to pose a generative or transgressive politics from their "real" position of relative power. I would argue that many of us are not as powerless as we like to represent ourselves.

Also, I am critical of the nostalgia embedded in a "return to shame" agenda. It's like those who wish on Puerto Ricans the days when most of the population had nothing to eat to challenge today's "consumer" culture. Or like those who would prefer to see Jennifer López crushed under the shame of her behind for the rest of her life. López did a major cultural workout with the shame of her body that made possible an important cultural debate and arguably even had an impact on how certain bodies circulate in public culture. But I do not desire shame on anyone for my enjoyment.

RG: What intrigues me about the Warholian superstars that you discuss—and thank you for beginning what I hope will be an extended treatment of the contributions of Puerto Rican queer aesthetics to Warhol, Smith, Ludlam, and others—is the difference between Holly Woodlawn and Mario Montez. Holly Woodlawn's own complex *desgracia* (disgrace) and pride did in fact hinge on her ability to "pass" as a white woman. Montez's racialized and "manly" body did not allow him an easy transition. In his performances in *Harlot* (1964), *Lupe* (1965), *Normal Love*

(1963), and *Chelsea Girls* (1966), among others, I'm always struck by his genuine defiance in the face of this "failure" to be white (and pretty).

FNM: Yet Woodlawn was not "pretty" either in any conventional sense, and her whiteness, I think, was made possible only through much effort.

RG: Certainly there was/is a lot of labor involved in Woodlawn's real-ness, but for Mario (not "poor" Mario), there were bodily markers (mus-cles, pigmentation) that could not be layered over. I think of his bodily excess and the way he stuffed his body into a Jean Harlow persona or a platinum blonde harlot sitting on a divan or a blanched mermaid. Montez did not seem to have the same racial hang-ups as Woodlawn.

FNM: That relates to the distinction I made earlier concerning mo-dalities of shame. As early-twentieth-century writer and tobacco worker Bernardo Vega put it in his critical pre-50s migration text, *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega* (1984), better-off *boricuas*—who more often than not "looked" white—would try to "pass" as Spaniards in New York, while workers were not afraid of being called "spics." While not at all times, popular performances are more likely to ebb out in the enjoyment or display of the lacking self. In this sense, the option of passing was not available to Montez, and he opted for the "popular" rather than "privi-leged" staging of shame.

RG: To get back to the totality of *Boricua Pop*, the project (especially the introduction and opening chapters) functions as historiography—tak-ing on (mostly male) P.R. public intellectuals. Why did you take this approach?

FNM: This may sound simplistic, but my earliest sense of social context was historical. This is partly the case because my father is a historian and since I was very young I have turned to history to understand the world. Suffice it to say that when I was nine, I was the official proofreader of my father's dissertation. And, of course, his dissertation (which later be-came a book [Negrón-Portillo 1981]) was about politics in Puerto Rico at the end of the nineteenth century.

RG: I like to think of your current work as a *proof*reading of Puerto Rican intellectual thought.

FNM: That's an elegant way of putting it. Although the proofreader will of course be proofread until desire for the text is consumed . . . which brings me to another potential set of reasons for my historiographic approach. Regardless of whether I actually support the ideas that Puerto Rico must be a colony because we don't have a heroic history or we don't know our history, these are central to Puerto Rican intellectual tradition. So, in *Boricua Pop*, I am still struggling with nearly two hundred years of discourse in which Puerto Rico as a nation is, above all, a textual

character in a romance that can only be fully consummated in the future, as journalist Félix Jiménez posed it to me in a recent conversation. In other words, Puerto Rico as "national subject" is irresistibly historiographic because it appears primarily on the page.

RG: How does this relate to your film, *Regarding Vieques* (2005)?

FNM: In many ways, the Vieques saga was very much staged as an epic that reaffirmed Puerto Rican virile nationality through a debate over who had control of the island, not coincidentally called "la isla nena"—the baby girl island. Yet, at the precise moment of "victory"—in the heat of the climax—the victory began to ring hollow, for the display of virility was just that, a performance in which the macho subjects had no intention of going all the way (in their own terms), that is, otherwise changing the power dynamic between native and metropolitan elites, let alone between the local elites and the differently subaltern.

RG: In Latin America, much of the studies of national "character" have been written by a male league of national intellectuals. Here I am more familiar with Mexican intellectuals—from Samuel Ramos to Octavio Paz. Did you at any moment feel you were running the risk of replicating a patriarchal type of diagnosis of the national character—I think of the diagnosed "melancholy" of the Mexican, for example.

FNM: Of course—and I did—in response to a long line of male nationalist discourse and figures that includes José de Diego, "el Caballero de la Raza," with his appeal to Puerto Ricans that they must learn how to say a virile "no"; the key intellectual of the 1930s, Antonio S. Pedreira, with his melancholic prose about Puerto Rican conformism, an alleged product of our miscegenation; and, last but not least, the nationalist leader and icon Pedro Albizu Campos, with his demand to young men that they stop being sissies and to women that they leave their "loose" morality behind and build the nation.

RG: Why use the term *queer* to describe Puerto Rican ethnonationality?

FNM: It disrupts macho nationalism. I guess that I found it irresistible. But more systematically, I am using the term in two ways, depending on location: as "weird" (nonnormative) and gender discordant. I am sure that some will misread this usage and argue that what I am saying is that all Puerto Ricans are gay. But what I am proposing is that the way that Puerto Ricans have been imagined as national subjects and have negotiated with this location has had the result of generating a "queer" sense of nationhood that has largely rejected dominant (virile) definitions of nationhood as the product of an epic past supported by infinite wealth and military might.

RG: Can you also address this feminist/queer critique of the male guard of Puerto Rican intellectuals, particularly the points where you find the stakes of the ethnonational replicating some of the binarisms of past writing on national character? I think you were beginning to express this in another of our conversations—when you commented about how you were looking for ways to offset the notion of the "fucked" (feminine) state involved in articulating ethnonational shame.

FNM: This is a critical dilemma. In Western culture, the feminine (including "passive" male queers) are the "fucked" ones. Puerto Ricans have been historically represented as either effeminate Cubans or violent bimbos. At the same time, that Puerto Rican ethnonationality has been constituted as feminine does not mean that there is no "violence," "resistance" in nonnational terms, and junctures of macho performances. In *Boricua Pop*, I took a small step. As ethnonational subjects we have been represented as feminine. As a politically imagined community Puerto Ricans appear effeminate when measured against hegemonic definitions of nationhood, and this location has produced a set of cultural interventions and ways of representing ourselves in the world that are explainable in terms of how we have been socially constituted through these categories.

Yet the questions that come next are even more difficult. Is it more desirable to be "feminine"? Is "masculine" the only alternative to "feminine"? If history can easily provide examples of "masculine" and "feminine" performances of nationhood, do these cancel gender categories, hence weakening their explanatory power? If the Puerto Rican "national" experience is actually less exceptional than it appears, as most contemporary nations do not control their territory and are subject to more powerful interests beyond their borders, is the alternative to speak in multiple vernaculars, that is, to write less about Puerto Ricans in general and more about communities that may or may not be primarily represented in this way? This nagging sense of how certain political discourse and theoretical generalization seduce was in part what prompted me to edit the volume titled *None of the Above* (2005).

RG: In this anthology, you and some of the other contributors were defining the "none of the above" moment. Can you talk a bit about this notion?

FNM: In 2001 and 2002, I organized two conferences on Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in the United States. The objective was to bring people together and come up with more inclusive ways to talk about nation, politics, diaspora, race, gender, and sexuality. The first one of those conferences was titled "None of the Above," the second, the "Puerto Rican

Vacilón."[5] "None of the above" alludes to the winning column in the 1998 status consultation in Puerto Rico in which a majority rejected statehood, independence, the status quo, and the associated republic options in favor of an undefined category, *"ninguna de las anteriores."* The "Puerto Rican Vacilón" was a sequel to the first conference in which we examined this tendency toward refusing the parameters of hegemonic political definitions. Importantly, to say *refusal* does not always mean to be oppositional in the way that most left intellectuals use the term. This refusal may not always be critical of state power. As scholar Juan Duchesne (2005) argues, the spectacularized protest in Vieques that I was commenting on earlier can serve dominant interests in the consolidation of (local) state power, even if it challenges the U.S. military.

Partly based on these conferences and the need to analyze the seemingly tumultuous last few years, I organized *None of the Above* (2005). It is organized around those junctures where hegemonic theoretical and/or political categories lose their power to explain Puerto Rican phenomena and alternative articulations emerge. My own contribution is about "dirty bomb" suspect José Padilla, alias Abdullah al Muhajir. Even if, as the U.S. government suggests, he planned to fry us all in the name of Allah, Padilla/al Muhajir critically exposes the still racist U.S. conceptions of citizenship, the current state's militarization of constitutional law, and the limits of Puerto Rican cultural nationalist politics in facing a "new world order." A Puerto Rican "ethnic" who claims to be African American, a Pentecostalist child preacher who prefers the company of Muslims, and a U.S. citizen trying to escape the American dream, Padilla's current fate, I would argue, is not a coincidence. Through his remarkable journey, Padilla/al Muhajir reminds us that in these times of al Qaeda and the "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act" (otherwise known as the USA PATRIOT Act), "real" Americans remain white, ambiguity is a weapon of the vulnerable as well as the strong, and one had better be something besides *boricua* to fight back.

RG: Are you in a "none of the above" moment?

FNM: In a different way. It is not until now that I have begun an alternative intellectual project that is increasingly interested in particularity not as an allegory of national identity or ethnic discourses but in other, yet undefined terms. Perhaps not surprisingly these new films and book

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[5] "None of the Above" took place April 10–12, 2001, at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey; "Puerto Rican Vacilón" took place April 18–20, 2002, at the University of Miami, Florida

projects are not about Puerto Ricans as national subjects but about char-
acters and communities assuming or taking on the ghosts that haunt
them—right at home.

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L i z a   J o h n s o n

Perverse Angle: Feminist Film, Queer Film, Shame

A **woman is burying** the body of her boyfriend, who has killed himself. She has managed to keep his death a secret. She has carried his body in parts in a backpack across a hilly golden meadow. Her face registers little, but her headphones suffuse her in a world of feeling—bad feeling, somewhere near the emotional territories of loss, denial, shame. She turns off the music and scans down across the grassy textures of the meadow with her eyes. She hears her own rustling, and the sounds of birds and insects are amplified and enveloping. When her work is finished, she dances lightly through the fields, marking out the space with her movements. She looks so closely at the tips of a tiny tree branch that her eyes almost cross (fig. 1). She looks down. She sees some waterbugs, and the soundtrack animates them with bright, mysterious sounds. She reaches into a small puddle to touch a worm. She is feeling her way through the scene, literally feeling it with her tactile brush across the landscape, with her reach into the puddle, feeling for worms with her hand. She is also *having feelings*, reaching emotionally and somewhat unsuccessfully, feeling for some kind of contact with this unlikely object choice, a sentient, creeping little grub.

I want to look at ways in which this affective and affecting scene from Lynne Ramsay's extraordinary 2002 art-house film *Morvern Callar* exemplifies certain new possibilities in feminist filmmaking. I want to look at possibilities that have emerged since the mid-nineties, new strategies for narrating desires that are expansively polymorphous and unexpected and also deeply shot through with feeling. Perhaps perversely, I am especially interested in *bad* feeling. Critics have noted *Morvern Callar*'s absorptive, highly tactile "candy-colored anomie" and made observations about the "affectlessness" of the title character, beautifully rendered by Samantha Morton (Hoberman 2002). I would argue, though, even if

Figure 1 Morvern's close-up, proximate way of seeing defines the visual grammar of Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar* (2002) Color version available as an online enhancement.

Morton's performance is extraordinary exactly for its reserve, that rather than seeing the character and the film as affectless it makes more sense to discuss them as absolutely flooded with—and traumatically overwhelmed precisely by—affect.

Although bad feeling may not be an obvious site of inquiry for finding "positive" or useful feminist images, I wish to position, as critically powerful and usefully feminist, films that take advantage of the expanded range that the contemporary moment offers for working with and through negative affect. I want to look at ways in which recent cinematic explorations of negative affect are opening exciting, eccentric, polymorphous, and, in many respects, queer ways of narrating women's desires. Thus the films I will look at here show desire as shot through with bad feeling, but they also show bad feeling as producing its own unexpected desires.

The bad feelings that structure *Morvern Callar* are established from its first shots—as is the film's striking visual register. We see fragments of Morvern's face in extreme close-up, alternating with fragments of her boyfriend's dead body, alternating with pulses of darkness produced by a nearby string of flashing Christmas-tree lights. She lies on the floor with him and reaches out, tracing his corpse with her hand, all at an intimate proximity, a lover's focal length. The camera simulates the close, familiar gaze that he can no longer offer in return. Morvern is cut loose, destabilized, and traumatized by the sudden removal of her structuring partnership, and the film is fundamentally structured, narratively and visually, around the crisis presented by the removal of his returned look, the loss

of his engagement. In ways that I want to explore here, this broken circuit of exchange structures both the character's dramatic problem—how or whether to relieve her isolation—as well as Ramsay's confident temporality and visual grammar.

Helpful here, precisely for thinking about Morvern's isolation, is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1995) work on the negative affect shame. Sedgwick argues that negative affects function on a spectrum of engagement and disengagement and that interest and shame are intricately bound together. She draws on Silvan Tomkins's phenomenology of shame to suggest that "the pulsations of cathexis around shame, of all things, are what either enable or disable so basic a function as the ability to be interested in the world" (Tomkins 1963, 245). Tomkins theorizes shame as "a specific inhibitor of continuing interest and enjoyment. Like disgust, it operates ordinarily only after interest or enjoyment has been activated, and it inhibits one or the other or both. Hence any barrier to further exploration that partially reduces interest or the smile of enjoyment will activate the lowering of the head and eyes in shame and reduce further exploration or self-exposure powered by joy" (1963, 123). This polarity describes and structures Morvern's oscillations and actions throughout the film, as she moves back and forth in unexpected directions between mute, isolated reticence and moments of engagement and interest. After an initial effort to immerse herself in the public isolation of an Ecstasy-fueled dance club, Morvern puts on her headphones, enveloping herself in a private soundtrack. The music she plays simulates an embrace from her dead lover, who has left her a Walkman and a mix tape as a Christmas present. So absorbed, she can remain thoroughly isolated, disinterested, and disengaged at her supermarket job. Visually, too, the film signals shame and its isolations, showing Morvern walking through the aisles, avoiding eye contact, and staring overhead at cardboard signs or down at the produce. Working in the produce aisle, Morvern has already lowered her head and eyes when a coworker notices her sadness and tries to comfort her. This attention causes Morvern to assume an even more dramatically withdrawn posture of shame. This posture of a shamed woman—head down, eyes averted— is nothing new to cinema and hardly inherently feminist. But *Morvern Callar* gives us a new angle, a reverse angle, showing us what Morvern's downward gaze sees: her refusal of human contact, her scrutiny of the vegetables, the extreme close-up of proximate objects as the visual experience of shame. We share her shamed vision of a maggot on a carrot, see what she sees as she feels and pokes it with her finger (fig. 2).

Visually, much of the action of *Morvern Callar* takes place precisely in these acts of looking from a place of depressive lassitude. If the film has

Figure 2 Sharing Morvern's shamed vision: her downward glance as the visual experience of shame (*Morvern Callar* 2002). Color version available as an online enhancement.

been criticized for its slow pacing, I would argue that its success is precisely in using temporality to mobilize Morvern's looks *as* action. Morvern looks promiscuously at anything she can, at the cigarette lighter her lover has given her for Christmas, at the hole in her sock, at the hairs on the Flokati rug, at maggots and worms and cockroaches. The film links the reach of her eye to the reach of her hand, merging the senses of seeing and feeling in her efforts at contact and engagement.[1] She reaches into puddles to touch worms. In fact, she touches everything she possibly can. Like the film's other oscillations between engaged reaching out and withdrawn isolation, Morvern's efforts to touch often fail. At several points in the film, Morvern reaches out to touch but ends up staring at her own hand, gesturing toward contact and then withdrawing into a way of treating her own reaching hand as an alienated object of visual inquiry. What starts as an effort to touch becomes focused back on herself, more like the familiar feminine inspection of one's own manicure, almost a surprising, alienated kind of autoeroticism.

[1] In *The Skin of the Film*, Laura Marks cites Gilles Deleuze, who has also addressed ways in which a particular cinematic image of the hand "doubles its prehensile function (as object) by a connective function (of space)," suggesting that, from that moment of grabbing "it is the whole eye which doubles its function by a specifically 'grabbing' one" (Marks 2000, 171). Marks finds this doubling of seeing and touching unnecessary in terms of evoking a sense of touch in cinema. *Morvern Callar* is certainly highly tactile, even without the identificatory possibilities presented by the image of the reaching hand. Nevertheless, I think it is important in terms of this film's unusual emphasis on reaching out, on touching with both hand and eye, as the diegetic action

What is remarkable about the film's treatment of Morvern's gaze, and the longing for a circuitry of returned gazing that it both avoids and expresses, is that throughout the camera sees from the perspective of the worm, or the Flokati rug, a perspective enabled by the conventions of cinema to return Morvern's unreturnable looks. That is, almost every shot in the film is literally photographed from the point of view of the nearby objects at which Morvern stares. The film is shot from the point of view of the cigarette lighter, of the worm, of the dead lover, of the hole in Morvern's sock, of her fingernail. The film's striking visual style, with its bright colors, reliance on extreme close-up, and omnipresence of Morvern's enveloping musical soundtrack, reads, at least on the surface, something like the aesthetics of music video. But it also functions as wish fulfillment and defines the primary gaze of the film not as Morvern's but as that of the impossible reverse angle, the point-of-view shot of an ant. Throughout, the film mobilizes Morvern's gaze at and attachment to proximate objects, animating the inanimate and imbuing with desire the incidental objects at which Morvern stares.[2]

Shame and its ways of seeing
I would like to think about these unusual visual dynamics—mobilizing a downward look as action, animating the reverse shot from the point of view of a worm—and to link them specifically to a phenomenology of shame. Embedded in Sedgwick's literary scholarship on shame are highly visual observations that can be drawn out usefully for thinking about cinema. Much of Sedgewick's work is based on Tomkins's aforementioned phenomenology of shame, which posits a concrete relation between looking and the experience of bad feeling. I would like to consider ways in which the relay of looks that Tomkins posits for shame offers new possibilities for thinking about certain cinematic operations of looking. Where psychoanalytic models of film theory have been enormously helpful for thinking about those operations, so have they been helpfully criticized by feminist, queer, and critical race theorists for their limited and homogenizing assumptions about identification.[3] I resist the way that psychoanalytic femi-

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[2] Although there is not space for a full treatment here, this animating of inanimate objects seems to me diegetically to enact some of Vivian Sobchack's claims about the phenomenology of film in *The Address of the Eye* (1992), in which she emphasizes the reversibility and reciprocity of looking in cinema, foregrounding precisely the force of the film as itself looking

[3] José Muñoz's introduction to *Disidentifications* (1999) offers an excellent analysis of many of these criticisms.

nism has presumed how cinematic operations of looking must inevitably function. Nevertheless, I think many psychoanalytic claims about cinematic looking make it possible to think about other ways that subjective attachments work, and about how films both look and *feel*. Despite a usefulness for thinking about visual dynamics, however, many psychoanalytic models have been rightly criticized by phenomenological film studies for positing that the image is a trick that inevitably trades in bad faith because of the putative lack at its center, universally and transhistorically reinscribing traditional understandings of sexual difference. Phenomenological criticism has proposed a more contingent model of embodied spectatorship, one in which a more legitimately intersubjective transfer of feeling is possible.[4] I suggest that the phenomenology Tomkins describes for shame, while by no means offering a universal model for thinking about all narrative film syntax, is useful in the films I will consider here for thinking about certain operations of looking that are themselves highly contingent on the stories the films are telling. The visual dynamics embedded in this phenomenology of shame are generative within these shame-inflected films, and I want to think about the eccentric desires that those operations of seeing and feeling can produce.

Like most narrative film grammar, the language of *Morvern Callar* and the other two films I discuss in this essay hinges on the reverse angle and the traditional shot structures that supplement it to produce a sense of a coherent world. This grammar also functions by way of the "eyeline match," the convention by which we understand that, when we see a character looking outside of the frame, in the next shot we are likely to see what she is looking at. Psychoanalytic feminism has allowed us to see how this grammar produces suturing effects that link the viewer to certain subjective perspectives. We see the protagonist, and then the shot reverses to show us what she sees. Sometimes we see from the point of view of her interlocutor in dialogue; sometimes we see from a disembodied "master shot" that suggests the possibility of a powerfully omniscient narrational vision. We are offered the pleasures of seeing her, as well as the pleasures of seeing from her perspective. But instead of assuming that these operations inherently take place in a world of universal drives and prohibitions, voyeurisms, and inevitably disavowed fetishisms, I argue that, in relation to shame and its ways of seeing, it is possible for these same formal strategies to render very different kinds of narratives and to yield very different subjective attachments.

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[4] As Sobchack writes, "The lived-body gestures language as a fullness and presence to the world, not as a substitute for being, but as an extension of it" (1992, 56).

If the Lacanian mirror stage that has been so important to psycho-analytic film theory depends on a relay of looks that produces a moment of misrecognition, shame depends on a relay of looks that produces a moment of *non*recognition, a moment of understanding the self to be embarrassingly alone and isolated from the ego-stabilizing smile of the parent. In this moment, "the circuit of mirroring expressions between the child's face and the caregiver's recognized face . . . is broken, the moment when the adult face fails or refuses to play its part in the continuation of mutual gaze; when for any one of many reasons, it fails to be recognizable to, or recognizing of, the infant who has been, so to speak, 'giving face' on the basis of a faith in the community of this circuit" (Sedgwick 1995, 211). It is this moment of recognition that has proven so generative for queer theory. The shame response, still founded in a circuitry of looks, is defined by the loss of feedback rather than by a misrecognition that is founded and foundering in universal reinscriptions of sexual difference.

Just as shame is founded in a primary circuitry of looks, its later man-ifestations in shame-prone subjects are also signaled visually, and I would like to bring these observations to bear directly on visual practice. Sedg-wick has noted that you will know shame when you see it by codes like blushing or "downcast eyes," by the avoidance of what Tomkins calls "interocular interaction" (1963, 180). Tomkins is himself sufficiently in-vested in these "blazons" that signal the experience of shame that he writes of social scientific attempts to measure shame response in human subjects according to the extent to which they look down, attempting to chart the intensity of shame by the "apparent horizon level" for a given subject (1963, 127).

I want particularly to draw out the implications of Tomkins's and Sedg-wick's visual claims. I would add to their observations the following: not only does shame look a certain way, but shame may also have associated ways of seeing. For my argument, it also bears asking, what do you see when your eyes are looking down? If onscreen eye contact is the glue that holds together the cinematic suture, what holds together a cinema infused with shame? How might an averted gaze resonate with looks that can also be characterized as singular, resistant to or against normativity, con-founding the erotics of looking usually marked by the reverse angle, pro-ducing a language that sees from and hinges on an antiromantic, perverse angle? What kinds of spectatorship might be produced by shame's perverse angle? What is it like for a spectator to see with and through an affect that produces and reproduces isolation and disidentification?

This relay of looks associated with the experience of shame—downward looks designed to avoid or diminish expected social contact and human

interest—closely parallels the onscreen looks in *Morvern Callar* and in the other shame-inflected films I address here. These looks are of particular interest for feminist inquiry because of the strange desires that this visual logic itself yields. As is the case with Morvern's promiscuous looking, the shamed gaze seems itself to produce new interest. This visual logic and the temporality that gives so much weight to her practices of looking register Morvern's attachments and engagements to nonhuman, inanimate, polymorphous objects as her primary investments—strange object choices indeed, and far afield from almost any scripted model for thinking about human sexual identity.

These engagements that come from her lowered gaze also lead to the film's most manifestly sexual, human erotic encounter. In one amazing scene, Morvern is sitting alone on the balcony of a modernist hotel in Ibiza, in the "Youth Med" resort to which she has traveled with her friend Lanna. Preferring to remain alone and blankly isolated, she sees and hears the sights and sounds of a party emerging from the hotel facing her. Her downward glance catches on a cockroach, which crosses under the door into her hotel room. Interested, she follows the roach through her room and into the hallway and ends up at a random hotel door through which she can hear the sounds of a man crying. She knocks on the door, and the man inside tells her that his mother has died. In a negotiation of intimacy and privacy, isolation and interest, they bounce around and off each other in ways that eventually end in sex, an act that quiets the musical soundtrack that has been associated with Morvern's isolating headphones. They then retreat into sadness. There is an intensity to the scene, not only because of its depiction of a sex act but because it is shot through with mutual grief, shared isolation, extremity of need, and temporary relief. The presence of this intimacy—initiated through Morvern's interest in a cockroach—produces not romance but perhaps an even more intense shame response. When she wakes in the stranger's embrace, Morvern panics at the intimacy, finds Lanna, and drags her out of the hotel and out of the town in a taxi. Staying in motion seems to suggest the possibility of maintaining Morvern's incomplete circuits of looking. At the film's end, she asks Lanna to run away with her, leaving their town behind and setting off for adventure. With this friendship that is not sexualized and intimate only in bounded ways, Morvern hopes to maintain the one relation within which she can comfortably negotiate her isolated posture, offering her company without insisting on too much contact, drawing out interest but not too much interest, completing a circuitry of looks but also offering moments of inattention, nonrecognition, and looking away. Her proposition to Lanna can neither be called lesbian nor *not*

lesbian. Here, I am interested exactly in this unexpected and indeterminate attachment that falls precisely between legible categories.

Feminist film, queer film

My concern is not so much to claim *Morvern Callar* as a lesbian or to claim the film for queer cinema. I am more interested in reading recent feminist films through the historical possibilities enabled by queer cinema, feminist films that I see as having common goals with queer films and that are in some ways beginning to blur the distinction between queer and feminist film. I want to think about the feminist, and certainly weird, if not queer, possibilities that working with and through shame and desire has offered, not just in *Morvern Callar* but also in Denise Gonçalves's short film *Sound of Steps* (1996) and Catherine Breillat's suppressed first feature, *A Real Young Girl* (1976). These filmmakers may not even be self-consciously interested in feminist projects, but they nevertheless constitute an independent cinema that I am willing to call feminist because of the ways they imagine unexpected possibilities for women's desire.

The surprising turns in these films' renderings of women's desire remind me of ways in which the experimental and independent gestures of the early nineties' new queer cinema reverberated with the frisson of seeing representations that moved beyond expected scripts for identity and desire. I see the queer films of that period, as well as the more recent mainstreaming of gay and lesbian images, as providing particular historical ground for these new films of women's desire and bad feeling. Whether or not it has raised our wages any, high-profile images like Hilary Swank's Oscar-winning turn as Brandon Teena in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), the likable gay guys on *Queer as Folk* happily doing it in the anonymous back rooms of Pittsburgh nightclubs, or the recent star-powered lesbian kisses in *The Hours* (2002) have had a real, palpable effect on the broad, mainstream visibility of some kinds of gay identities and acts, which are moving out of subcultural markets and into the broad reach of the U.S. media. The expansion of international markets for gay and lesbian cinema has also helped to produce queer film worldwide, with new gay and lesbian features emerging not just from Hollywood and the West but also from Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Together with other kinds of political work, these images have had a hand in moving marginal or unacceptable sexual identities and acts closer to a broadly accepted center. Although the backlash against this mainstreaming seems to be building as I write this, this movement away from the margins was perhaps most significantly marked by the "centrist" U.S. Supreme Court in its June

2003 reassessment of contemporary sexual mores in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which legalized sodomy for both straight and gay people.

As particular gay and lesbian images have become more appealing to mainstream markets, the possibility of imagining and seeing on screen something that might be called "normative" gay and lesbian lifestyles has emerged. For example, in 2002, *The Hours* and *Queer as Folk* both offered similar scenes of moneyed, child-raising white lesbian couples ordering from a catering service, to say nothing of Bravo's 2003 series *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, in which five gay men teach heterosexual men how to be better shoppers. These newly possible scenes of "normative" gay lifestyles function not so much to resist normative scripts for identity and desire as they do to shift the terms of that normativity.[5]

Lisa Henderson has characterized "positive images" as having a context-specific quality—positive to whom? Under what circumstances? She writes, "Positive no longer means portraying members of historically marginalized groups in mainstream or high-status positions, or simply rewriting the rules about who can and cannot be represented as a member of the social and symbolic club" (1999, 41). The independent gestures of the early 1990s seem to me to constitute important historical grounding for expanding repertoires of queer desire. And if I am not prepared to say that representations of mainstream gay shoppers in this recent blossoming of gay and lesbian film are themselves adequate as "positive images," they nevertheless certainly constitute an important grounding for contemporary images of identity and desire that *do* surprise and—importantly—help to build confidence that many markets may be prepared to accept representations of new desires, of new sexual identities and acts.

Linda Williams has recently described a "new European cinema" that breaks down the "firewall" that has historically separated scenes of explicit sex acts from scenes that deal with "philosophy, politics, and emotion" (2001, 23). She argues that, by breaking down this division, these films are "forging new ways of presenting and visually experiencing cinematic sex acts" (23). Although the films I consider are not limited to European ones, I understand the films that I am reading here to be part of this phenomenon, for they bring together treatments of desire and (negative)

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[5] In the contemporary flush of broad-market gay and lesbian programming, I am much more prepared to understand as "positive images" work like Cheryl Dunye's *Stranger Inside* (2001), an empathetic and beautifully performed piece narrating the concerns and desires of a group of African-American lesbians in prison, or HBO's popular *Six Feet Under*, in which the bickering gay couple is the most nearly normative pair in a fictional world that posits no particular standards of normative romance, coupling, or stable sexual identity.

emotion. Although it is not her focus, Williams also notes her surprise at seeing desire paired with bad feeling; she describes herself as "shocked" (22) to see Patrice Chereau's *Intimacy* (2001) pair certain very common heterosexual sex acts with emotions related to need, sadness, melancholy. Her characterization of her own surprise is hardly a puritanical one; indeed, she is surprised not at the explicitness of the sex act but rather by its simultaneous transmission of bad feeling. Her surprise is precisely at seeing unexpected and expanded possibilities for women's desire.

Where Williams usefully reads these films against the "alternative universe" of pornography, for my purposes it is more useful to read them against the historical ground and common projects of recent queer cinema. If gender and sexuality have long been tightly linked together, these films have truly begun to problematize a distinction between queer and feminist film. I wish neither to characterize these films as lesbian nor to diminish the importance of work that is lesbian. But I want to look at the ways in which recent feminist films are pushing at a sexual terrain that is not really charted, in which identity and desire are destabilized and unexpected and, while not homosexual, seem to me most certainly queer in their polymorphous, autoerotic, or otherwise truly nonnormative erotics.

Shame and women's not-to-be-looked-at-ness: Denise Gonçalves's Sound of Steps

When Gonçalves's short film *Sound of Steps* appeared on the international festival circuit in 1996, much of its unexpected intensity registered as a poetic sexual explicitness, which one U.S. festival catalog chalked up to a "Brazilian openness" to sexuality. While national cultures certainly differ importantly in their constructions of sexuality, I would also argue that, at least in the United States, it may not be the modest explicitness of the film that is surprising. Rather, it is exactly the film's insistence on telling a story in which bad feeling resonates throughout the protagonist's attraction to the obscure objects of her desire and throughout the sex act that the film depicts. Based on a story by Clarice Lispector, *Sound of Steps* is tonally beautiful and shot in 35 mm, high production values that are often financially out of reach for feminist short films. Its visual field seems lushly sentimental, and the film surprises when it proves to be un- or even antisentimental and instead steeped in negative affect. In extreme and elegant ways, its field of vision is cinematically structured by exactly the kinds of nonrecognition that provide the visual foundations of shame.

The film's protagonist, Mrs. Candida, is positioned both within and outside of a stabilizing heterosexual identity. She has outlived her husband,

and at the age of eighty-one, she has become fundamentally unseeable, invisible, an impossible object within the circuitry of desire that her own looks repeatedly initiate. If much of feminist film practice and criticism has concerned itself with the task of resisting women's objectification, here Gonçalves's desiring subject is in crisis precisely over the world's refusal to treat her as a sexual object. The film opens with an over-the-shoulder shot of Mrs. Candida standing on the porch of her house, looking out into the landscape. Convention suggests that the next shot should be from her point of view, but instead of a wider shot opening out into the distant landscape we see extreme close-ups of caterpillars on nearby leaves. These shots are long in duration and suggest her languid attention to these insects. As in *Morvern Callar*, they are the visual terrain of the immediately proximate, of what can be seen through downcast eyes. Mrs. Candida is, from the film's beginning, in search not just of an object for her desiring look but of a subject to return the circuitry of gazes configured across the cut, a circuitry that is, throughout, unavailable to her. But if *Morvern Callar* is shot mostly from the perspective of insects and nearby objects, in *Sound of Steps* there is no such satisfaction. If these insects can even be thought of as sentient, they fail to complete the circuitry of looks required to sustain desire across the reverse angle. Instead, they point back to the protagonist's isolation, her shame precisely over her not-to-be-looked-at-ness.

As if to emphasize Mrs. Candida's invisibility, the camera shortly thereafter positions her in the backseat of a car, unseen and unheard by her daughter in the front seat, her own eyeline rolling dreamily back into her head rather than out of the frame in the manner that traditionally anticipates a reverse angle. We see her glance rest on landscapes outside the car window and also understand her interior gaze to be making associative links, seeing not in the present but in memory or fantasy. Her eyes fall on the bouquet of flowers in her hands, which reminds her of things she saw or might have seen while shopping: a bountiful display of roses fills the frame, and the camera smoothly pans as if to represent the movement of her eyes across the display. As though overwhelmed precisely by the fullness and excessive presence of that image and destabilized by the inability of the roses to return her desiring gaze, Mrs. Candida faints, and the image cuts to black. This failure of vision seems to acknowledge that shame puts the subject in crisis, to acknowledge the impossibility of sustaining a stable point of view, an identity, in the absence of a circuitry of looks—that is, in the presence of shame's nonrecognition.

When Mrs. Candida wakes from her faint, the flower vendor offers her a glass of water, and their hands touch incidentally, in close-up and slow

motion, as he passes her the glass. The lingering of her vision here shows her wish not just for visual or "interocular" contact but for actual contact, sexual contact, for touch. In another scene, a thorn prick from a flower brings her back to the register of touch and sets off a metaphoric sequence in memory or fantasy, a scene of wildly bridling mares seen, ultimately, from the point of view of a constrained horse penned separately away from the others, hidden from view. In the absence of any available object, Mrs. Candida's gaze, as well as her touch, is turned back on herself, and we see her thin, wrinkled body as she dries herself after a shower. In a series of close-ups, her hand passes between her legs. She reaches for her own back, her hip, sexualizing different areas of her own body as a reluctant autoerotic attachment.

Throughout, Mrs. Candida remembers her absent husband fondly, but the film is careful to position her longing as neither mourning nor melancholy. Her desire for touch is not limited to a desire for his touch. Flashback images of their marriage are resolutely schematic, unlike the eccentric specificity of her longing glances at insects and plants. She sees herself with her husband in a tableau akin to a wedding photograph, or underneath him in bed, her face impassive, neither especially happy nor unhappy—and seen always from a third-person perspective. She remembers desire; perhaps she even remembers pleasure. She seems to remember the possibility of the returned look, the returned touch, not as pure pleasure but perhaps as preferable to the invisibility produced by her age.

This understanding that her longing is not so much for her husband as for the abstract reciprocation of her loose desire is cemented when Mrs. Candida goes to the doctor. She asks him when this unspeakable objectless desire will go away. He acknowledges her in language, replying, "I'm afraid sometimes it never stops," validating the pain of her unfulfilled desire and her unreturned look but still not offering a returned look. The director positions the shot over the doctor's shoulder, so we never see his face, nor do we see from his perspective in ways that might instantiate the more usual narrative erotics of looking.

In recognition that she is and will continue to be possessed of this painful desire, the next scene slowly pans to reveal Mrs. Candida in her bed, masturbating in long shot. Intensely bound to her subjective position, even in this omniscient view that has no reverse angle, the scene is full with her own understanding of this act. It is a source of sexual pleasure, to be sure, but a kind of pleasure that is thoroughly infused with pain, shame, and compromise and narrated in such a way as to be singularly hers (fig. 3). It is exactly this singularity within the narration of desire and depiction of a sex act, its infusion with affects, especially shame, and

Figure 3   Desire infused with pain, shame, and compromise: Mrs. Candida masturbating in a long shot in Denise Gonçalves's *Sound of Steps* (1996). Color version available as an online enhancement.

the possibility of desiring outside the confines of the character's presumed and understood sexual identity—of showing her fantasmatic, polymorphous attachment to insects, flowers, horses, and parts of her own body—that seems to me so productive for feminist inquiry.

While it seems possible that part of the impact of *Sound of Steps* comes from its appeal to prurient interests, I find that its engagement is much different than a pornographic one. The film's impact comes less from its explicitness than from its novelty, offering an erotic narrative treatment of old, wrinkled flesh and an unfamiliar story that is not a romantic script shifted onto new players but actually a different story of desire, realized in large part through shame's particular optics. And like Morvern Callar's, Mrs. Candida's desire is not at all gay but rather queer in ways that, like queer cinema, expand repertoires for thinking about desire.

What happens when shame sees? Catherine Breillat's *A Real Young Girl*

Breillat's suppressed first feature, *A Real Young Girl* (1976), belongs as much to the time of its production as it does to the contemporary conditions of possibility that I argue have been produced by recent queer cinema. Produced in 1976, during the period in which France established

its X-rating system, the film is in many respects a product of the same cultural moment that offered the conditions of possibility for films like *Last Tango in Paris* (1972) (in which Breillat performs), *Salò* (1975), and *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976). These films collectively pushed contemporary boundaries within cinematic treatments of sexuality, and their shared controversial receptions began to mark out the difference between what kinds of representations can be imagined by a filmmaker within a historical moment and what kinds of representations can be more broadly socially accepted and understood as legible. Remembering this period, Breillat shows herself to have long been interested in the questions I am taking up here, questions of seeing desire as shot through with shame and bad feeling:

> Twenty years ago, I had lunch with Roberto Rossellini. He asked me, "What would a woman's vision add to the vision of love in cinema?" At the time I had made only one film, *Une Vraie Jeune Fille (A True Young Girl)*. I answered him very resolutely, "A woman would add the point of view of shame, which men are incapable of having.". . . When you're a woman, you have to say things that have never been said before. You can see that those things that have never been uttered before are in each one of us, but have been hushed up and shut down. (Sklar 1999, 25)

In the nearly thirty years since shooting *A Real Young Girl*, Breillat's fearlessness around sexual explicitness has combined in inflammatory ways with her insistence on "adding the point of view of shame," causing repeated controversies with each new film release around the putatively pornographic, degrading, obscene, and antifeminist effects of her work, perhaps most famously around *Romance*, her 1999 chronicle of female masochism. *A Real Young Girl* first caused controversy when Breillat tried to release it in 1976. She argued her case before the French censorship board and convinced its members that the film was "not a 'sexy' film in the sense of making men masturbate" but rather that "it was a film on the shame of sexuality" (Weigand 2001). Although Breillat prevailed with the censorship board, she was unable to win the same argument with public opinion. Critics, distributors, and even her own backers agreed that the film was unacceptable to the public taste of the time. This suppression rendered the film literally unwatchable for twenty-six years; it was finally released in the cinema in 2000 and is now also available on video and DVD.

Thus, I want to argue that, while the film is in many ways a marker of

the sexual and film cultures of Europe in the seventies, it is in many ways also a marker of the possibilities of the present moment. Recent changes in the media landscape—not only those produced by queer cinema but arguably by Breillat herself since 1974—make *A Real Young Girl* comprehensible, watchable in the present for the first time. Although the film stands out for its sexual explicitness, I am more interested in it for its sexual precision, for the specificity of the protagonist's unexpected desire and attachments.[6]

Consistent with Breillat's stated intentions, the film depicts specific desires in their fullness, including the ways in which they resonate with shame. Like Sedgwick, Breillat is not using shame morally, either as a threat about what happens to bad girls or as something to be overcome. Rather, shame functions as an element of experience that can be explored. For Breillat, since shame and other "taboo" or degraded elements and affects are integral parts of the fullness of sex acts, the exploration and engagement of those elements may themselves work toward restoring "female dignity" (Sklar 1999) not so much because the exploration removes shame but because it acknowledges and spends time with shame. It becomes possible to look more precisely not just at the sexually explicit acts of Alice, the film's young protagonist but also at her very precise desires, not only for men but also for zones of her own body, for insects, and for a range of nonhuman objects.

Breillat's is a highly self-aware cinema, sometimes critiqued as "too theoretical" and certainly aware of and influenced by French feminist theory and doubtless many of the premises of psychoanalytic film theory. (She currently even teaches a course on "developing a female gaze.") Breillat's own descriptive language often runs to notions of transgression and taboo, suggesting that she is responding to and defying critical prohibitions around women's desire. In one early scene, for example, Alice is subject to the watchful eye of the schoolmistress in her dormitory, who

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[6] Both popular and academic writing about Breillat have tended to focus on the controversy surrounding the sexual explicitness of her work, and there is a clear role for Breillat in feminist discussions of porn and the representation of sex acts. Although this discussion has an important function, for the last thirty years it has been impossible to move beyond seeing *A Real Young Girl* in terms of a pornography debate; its images appeared so inassimilable that it has been impossible to discuss them in any terms other than ones related to shock, obscenity, and their relation to women's empowerment and women's oppression. But for my purposes here, I wish to bracket that discussion in favor of one that I believe to be both newly possible and more interesting for the present, one that involves a more thorough engagement with Breillat's actual treatment of shame

physically removes Alice's hand from its location under the blanket and between her legs. When the schoolmistress leaves the room, Alice defiantly writes her name on the mirror near her bed with the fluids from her vagina, an almost literal *écriture féminine*, foregrounding a relation to a self-consciously feminist project and staging a desire that is at least in part produced by its prohibition.

Breillat engages prohibitions that she may understand to pertain to women as a category of people, or, if not all women, at least women of Alice's kind—pubescent petit-bourgeois white girls in Charles de Gaulle's France—who are likely to be subject to a similar set of prohibitions. While I feel that there is much that is useful in this feminist strategy, I also want to look at ways in which the film simultaneously produces specificity—a wonderful singularity of Alice's attachments—through the articulation of shame affects. Shame may not always be linked to defying prohibitions, nor may it only be linked to defying prohibitions, but in this film, for Alice, it often is. Sedgwick reminds us that shame, "like other affects, is not a discrete intrapsychic structure but a kind of free radical" that "in different people and also in different cultures attaches to and permanently intensifies or alters the meaning of—of almost anything: a zone of the body, a sensory system, a prohibited or indeed a permitted behavior, another affect such as anger or arousal, a named identity, a script for interpreting other people's behavior toward oneself" (1995, 237). If Alice's shame seems to attach primarily to the prohibited desires that dominate her imagination, and that are prohibited not only to her but to a larger category of French women, I want to argue that Alice's vision as it is inflected by shame is precisely what opens up possibilities for the specificity of her strange attachments.[7]

For example, in one very clear instance of prohibited looking and desiring, during what is probably but ambiguously marked as Alice's fantasy, Alice looks down and sees her father's penis hanging out of his pants. The shame of seeing this causes her to further avert her gaze: in the next shot we see an extreme close-up of her head turning away, her eyelids closing. The film then associatively cuts to a shot of Alice sitting on a fence near a train track, looking down at herself. She exposes herself to

[7] I am interested here in imagining a kind of singularity that is not individualistic and never outside of ideology. I am particularly interested in Muñoz's recent work (2000) on affect, which historicizes and racializes affect itself for the purposes of minority inquiry. I believe that the kind of singularity I am imagining here is both particular enough to contest the violently homogenizing assumptions of psychoanalytic claims about identification and also possibly general enough to be grounded in history, nation, and race.

Figure 4   Alice in Catherine Breillat's *A Real Young Girl* (1976; color version available as an online enhancement). When she is looking down, one of the things she can see is, in fact, her own genitals

a passing train, and the film makes clear that, when she is looking down, one of the things she can see is, in fact, her own genitals. The next series of shots pictures her sitting on the train tracks, bored, alternately engaged and disengaged, picking up rocks and putting them in her vagina (fig. 4). In the logic proposed by this sequence, prohibition produces desire, to which shame attaches. As in *Morvern Callar* and *Sound of Steps*, shame produces looking down, a position from which one can see a certain range of proximate objects. If this vision, this act of looking down, holds its own interest and engages the subject in new attachments and desires, Breillat is taking the logic even further than the other filmmakers I have considered. Here, the erotic and polymorphous attachment is the most literally sexualized, and these proximate objects literally become sex objects.

Throughout, the film oscillates between scenes of desires that are produced by prohibitions and ones that are produced by shame itself. In the film's first five minutes, Alice arrives at her parents' home from boarding school and, in the manner of a sullen teenager, avoids contact with her parents, resenting the enactments of authority and prohibition that her parents represent, disengaged from their efforts at conversation and eye contact. Her mother remarks directly on this disengagement: "You could try talking to us." Alice's gaze lands on other things as she avoids meeting her parents' looks. She sees dead flies trapped in the flypaper and stares at her teacup, stirring it with a spoon. During this visual engagement

borne of an averted gaze, the spoon itself becomes a desired object. Alice drops it on the floor, and in the process of picking it up, slips it inside her underpants under the table, all the while maintaining her modest downward glance over the table.

While the film is in many ways an attempt to give a precise account of Alice's inculcation into heterosexual desire, the narrative is nevertheless located at a moment that is not fully about an engagement with desire for men. The film lingers on autoerotic, abject, and fetishistic desire. Alice's attachment is for the most part not really to men but to parts of her own body, her own fluids, to objects like a spoon or a bicycle seat. And when the attachment is to a man, it is precisely to treat him as a fetish object rather than as a desiring subject. Scenes of unreturned gazing proliferate: Alice stares at a man tapping a tree for syrup, at her father's employee Jim while he works in the lumberyard, at Jim as he kisses a woman at the fair. She conceals her own looking in ways that resonate both as inversions of the assumption that only men can practice voyeurism and as a shame-prone wish to efface herself, recede, detach, and vanish— that is, a wish to repeat and reverse the broken circuit of looking that characterizes shame.

Equally, the occasions in which men do complete this circuit of looking are both horrifying and threatening to Alice. To her great dismay, she discovers that, in an ambiguously real or imagined moment, she is seated on a roller coaster next to a flasher, who opens up the briefcase on his lap to show her his genitals, proving that the averted gaze does see and cannot always produce a safe disengagement. She is disgusted by a boy she has been openly staring at in a café, who avenges his objectification by chasing Alice on a bicycle and pulling up her skirt. She is horrified and looks down to inspect what he has seen, noting, "Hairs were curling out of my panties. I wished he'd die."

One of the film's most memorable and sexually explicit scenes stages and negotiates exactly this problem. We see Alice involved in her own masochistic fantasy with Jim, which even as she imagines it is shot through with shame. She lies naked and spread-eagle on a deserted road, and her perspective controls the scene. Her gaze, while averted from Jim, lingers on barbed wire, on the sky. We see fragmentary, extreme close-ups of her face looking away from and then at Jim as he inserts a worm into her vagina and then puts ripped-up worm parts on her pubis. When she finally meets his gaze, he is laughing at her. Her sustained look straight into his eyes, ultimately, reverses the shame and causes him, momentarily, to stop laughing.

The final third of *A Real Young Girl* involves more direct engagement,

either in fantasy or perhaps in reality, between Alice and Jim. Although these scenes play out interesting ideas about Alice's control and lack of control in the erotic situations that she either imagines or experiences, they are less interesting for my inquiry. For me, more interesting is her engagement with her own underpants, or a teaspoon, or her own earwax, or her fetishistic fantasies that may involve men, not in their traditional role as desiring romantic subjects but rather as fantasmatic attachments. These are among the strange attachments that shame produces and facilitates, the curious and idiosyncratic, even singular ways of subjects venturing away from normally understood—and even simultaneously functioning—scripts for sexual acts and identities.

Shame's contagion and spectatorship

My thinking here shares with psychoanalytic feminist film theory an interest in the operations of looking, considerations of ways in which cinematic structures can produce certain subjective attachments, even if I want to point to very different mechanisms by which these attachments take place or to effects or affects that are not specifically structures or mechanisms at all. In ways that are similar to my inquiry into the visual dynamics of shame, Laura Mulvey's influential "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) locates these dynamics in three different cinematic looks. She considers the look of the characters, the look of the camera, and the look of the audience. For my inquiry, perhaps the most significant of the looks she addresses is the third one, having to do with the audience's spectatorial looking, which, for my argument, also bears on the question of spectatorial feeling. I want to ask: What do we make of the look of the audience as it watches the film? How does the audience see shame, and see *with* shame? How do viewers look at and with feeling, and in this case, with bad feelings?

If much of Mulvey's iconoclastic proscriptions have to do with the refusal of absorptive spectatorial engagement, it is also possible to imagine a spectatorship that functions exactly *through* its affective fullness in the films I have described. Yet I see these films producing an affective response that works much differently than the identifications imagined by psychoanalytic feminism. How might one think of identification in a film flooded with shame, an affect in which the originary moment of nonrecognition depends in basic ways on moments of failure within a circuitry of looking? How might this failure be paralleled in cinematic spectatorship, in which the viewer does not, generally, fail to look at the movie screen?

One of the most important claims of Sedgwick's work on shame is that

shame is curiously contagious, that seeing shame itself provokes a shame response: "One of the strangest features of shame—but perhaps also the one that offers the most conceptual leverage for projects like ours—is the way bad treatment of someone else, bad treatment by someone else, someone else's embarrassment, stigma, debility, bad smell, or strange behavior, seemingly having nothing to do with me, can so readily flood me—assuming I'm a shame-prone person—with this sensation whose very suffusiveness seems to delineate my precise, individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable" (1995, 212). Just as shame is isolating and individuating for the subject who feels it, so does it also flood the person who may simply witness its signs and semaphores. Certainly cinema is flooded and flooding with affect; its absorptions move the viewing subject, to tears or laughter or fear or sadness, and shame is no exception. But if shame is so individuating, so contagious, what are the negotiations by which we can actually look at a movie that involves shame and negative affects? Why do we not spend the whole movie suffused in isolation and embarrassment, lowering our eyes and head to reduce further exposure, looking down? If a movie shows us shame, why do we not look away?

I would argue that this question points exactly to a clash between a sensuous embrace of affective fullness that I see operating in these films and the iconoclastic, antipleasure aesthetics proscribed by psychoanalytic feminism.[8] Visual pleasure feels good, and in the films that I have discussed, which work with and through this contagious negative affect, visual pleasure is necessary and useful precisely for its ability to sustain a spectatorial desire to look at the image that is strong enough to act in

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[8] If the towering presence of this renunciatory stance is strong enough in feminist film studies, its power in different generations of feminist culture more broadly should not be overlooked. These aesthetics of renunciation remain a problem for contemporary feminism, which is both enabled by and saddled with the memory of the seventies. The period of the women's movement was a time when revolution was actually imaginable. In the very different moment of the present, the strategies of movement politics, including and perhaps even especially gender and sexual politics, are often remembered and misremembered, even caricatured, as oppressively doctrinaire gestures of speaking truth to power and saying "no" to pleasure, especially by women who have no experiential memory of the seventies. Efforts at negotiating between the so-called second and third waves have seemed necessary, and recent attempts have focused not only on the recognition of differences among women but also on these real and imagined memories of renunciation, with books like *Manifesta* tactically asserting that you do not have to give up your MAC lipsticks and hip-hop records to be engaged in feminist struggles (Baumgardner and Richards 2000). If the films I discuss here seem to fall clearly on the side of sensual, absorptive aesthetics, it may also be part of why they do not necessarily seem obviously or self-consciously feminist

tension with the affective strength of the desire to look away. Maybe *Morvern Callar*'s anomie, to be seeable at all, *must* be candy-colored. In addition to the other registers of affective force that the cinema offers, in its absorbing soundscapes and the affecting registers of acting, it may be precisely through visual pleasure that the narration of these negative affects and their related attachments becomes affectively bearable, possible. The lush production values of *Sound of Steps*, the tactile pleasures of looking engaged in by *A Real Young Girl*'s Alice as well as the considerable pleasures of looking *at* Alice, the high-chroma close-ups of *Morvern Callar*'s cinematography and its fulfilling animation of inanimate gazes—these pleasures may be exactly what sustain the possibility of the film in tension with the contagious properties of shame and its attendant inclination to avert the gaze.

In the films I have discussed here, shame and its disidentifications may produce effects that have something in common with the goals of a Brecht-ian alienation effect, though they function through radically different aes-thetics.[9] They are full of feeling instead of drained of it, absorptive instead of alienating. In Mulvey's call for the destruction of visual pleasure, she lays out the terms for more acknowledgment of both the logic and op-erations of the camera and for a materialist reflexivity that destroys ab-sorption and the "satisfaction, pleasure, and privilege" of acting as an "invisible guest" while under the "spell of an illusionistic world" (1989, 26). She calls for filmmakers to "free the look of the audience into dia-lectics and passionate detachment" (26). By "passionate" detachment, it is clear that Mulvey did not imagine a detachment that actually works by way of passion. She did not mean a detachment that works by way of the absorptive flooding in of affect but rather one that works against it. But perhaps, in the case of negative affects in these films, it is exactly a ne-gotiation between the spectator's passionate attachment and an equally passionate detachment, that is, an affectively driven mode of disidentifi-cation. The individuating force of shame may, for spectators of these films, produce not a dialectics of detachment but rather a simultaneity of ab-sorption and disidentification. This simultaneity may function not simply to reinscribe dominant relations of gendered power nor to reproduce

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[9] What I mean here is not exactly the same as Muñoz's enormously useful sense of the term *disidentification*, nor is it the same as in other models of "oppositional reading," though disidentifications in his sense of the term may also be at play (Muñoz 1999). Here, though, by *disidentification* I mean a particular reaction to seeing shame that is at once a recognition (I see shame, and I see with the vision of shame) and a refusal (I am not that kind of abject subject; I do not wish to see or be near that)

infinite chains of negative affect. Rather, through this simultaneity shame can be understood as a type of enabling knowledge by which to see and feel desires and attachments, even weird ones, with a kind of singularity that demands neither identification nor repulsion, that functions, perhaps, more like empathy.

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Celine Parreñas Shimizu

Helen Lee

Sex Acts: Two Meditations on Race and Sexuality

Celine Parreñas Shimizu is an academic who teaches Asian American studies and is the award-winning and internationally screened film-maker of *Mahal Means Love and Expensive* (1993), *Her Uprooting Plants Her* (1995), *Super Flip* (1997), and *The Fact of Asian Women* ([2002] 2004). Helen Lee is a Toronto-based filmmaker whose inter-nationally screened work includes *Sally's Beauty Spot* (1990), *My Niagara* (1992), *Prey* (1995), *Subrosa* (2000), and *The Art of Woo* (2001). This conversation took place in Toronto, Canada; Seoul, South Korea; and Santa Barbara, California, in July 2003.

Helen Lee (*HL*) and *Celine Parreñas Shimizu* (*CPS*): As Asian American feminist filmmakers, the explicit representation of the erotic in our works has a distinct relation to the hypersexual representation of Asian and Asian American women in industry cinema. Thus, we will be talking about why sex is so central in our films, and we would like our conversation here to highlight the challenge our work brings to issues in contemporary Asian American film feminisms.

CPS: I came to filmmaking informed and fueled by the need to counter the power of existing images of Asian women. While to some degree reactive, my creation of such images makes sense to me in light of how I experience as guilty pleasure the hypersexual fantasies about Asian women circulating in American cinema and public life. The triangulation of popular images, the pleasure of consuming problematic images, and the formation of the "self" compel me. Mine is a professional focus but also a very personal one: a pivotal moment of sexual awareness happened on a bus when I was a Berkeley undergrad in my first year away from home. An old veteran asked me if he had met me in Vietnam and seen

me doing acrobatic sexual tricks in the bars. This is an extreme example, but the connection between the sex work attributed to Asian women, images on screen depicting them, and my own new sexual formations collided in ways that inform the language of my filmmaking. In fact, both of us make explicit sexual representations of Asian women in our movies.

When I say *Asian women* here, I am referring to a particular construction in the cinema. Asian women appear on screen as dragon ladies and prostitutes with hearts of gold, and they perform a particular sexual role as fantastic figures in American cinema. The Asian American feminist documentaries by Asian Women United, such as Deborah Gee's *Slaying the Dragon* (1989) and Valerie Soe's *Picturing Oriental Girls* (1992), identify this social problem well. *Picturing Oriental Girls* effectively shows the persistence of Asian women as sexual caricatures in Hollywood movies, especially as these corroborate other media such as men's magazines and mail-order bride catalogs. Selecting small moments in popular cinema that feature sexualized Asian women, Soe convincingly shows these repetitive caricatures to be a perverse undercurrent in Western popular culture. In *Slaying the Dragon*, Gee presents the limited evolution of Asian women on screen as they affect and delimit perceptions of Asian American women in contemporary society. In an oft-cited article, "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed" (1989), Renee Tajima assesses the problem as a no-win situation for Asian women spectators who learn about themselves as distorted representations of "lotus blossoms" or "dragon ladies." Indeed, the legacy of Asian female hypersexuality in the popular imagination cannot be overestimated, as it shapes how Asian women see themselves and are seen by others. However, Gee's and Soe's important critical film texts depend upon a certain kind of unidirectional understanding of representation: that Hollywood images demonize, injure, and oppress Asian American women. It is as if spectators simply learn and accept these images rather than converse with and challenge them in a dialectical process.

My own work aims to capture that dialectical process, to recognize not only the pain but also the pleasure provoked by these images. I understand cinema as a set of productive relations among socially and historically situated makers, spectators, and the text/image itself, operating within culture as something alive and contentious. As Jessica Hagedorn describes in her essay, "Asian Women in Film: No Joy, No Luck" (1994), pleasure may be available for viewers even in the most unexpected representations. In Michael Cimino's *Year of the Dragon* (1985), for example, Hagedorn identifies the Jade Cobra gang girl as affirmative and enjoyable, particularly for an Asian American female spectator who participates in a kind of "take what I want, leave what I want" viewing practice. Peter Feng (2000)

describes Nancy Kwan's authorship in *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) similarly. He characterizes consuming *Suzie Wong* as a double-edged experience, both painful and pleasurable, and he emphasizes the constraints upon actors who can find work only in the portrayal of stereotypical characters. Both of these writers touch upon the ambivalent experience of spectators of color, who must either take in their own annihilation (the Jade Cobra gang girl gets hit by a car) or partake in the white male fantasy of sexy Asian female subservience in *Suzie Wong*.

As a filmmaker, I try to turn these caricatures around by imbuing the sexually available Asian female with emotion and situating her in a historical context marked by colonialism, racism, and sexism. In *Mahal Means Love and Expensive* (1993), the Asian female is a desiring subject who offers herself to an unworthy lover as if she were dessert. My direction underscores her highly contradictory subject position by highlighting her complex and ambivalent participation in sexual activity. I link immigration and colonial definitions of womanhood to her emotional experience of sex. Thus, in a moment of raw vulnerability, she objectifies herself to her lover. Her behavior, though not admirable, cannot simply be understood as positive or negative. Rather, we have a more complicated picture of Asian women's sexuality than that available in popular representation. Because Asian female sexuality on screen typically signifies a particular racial perversity, to bring emotions such as pain and discomfort to bear on representations of intimacy renders their sexuality in a very different way. It makes Asian women more human in their relationship to sex.

Beyond this critique of film content, I also offer a cinematic language reflective of my multiple concerns about race, class, sex, and gender power dynamics. In my last film, *The Fact of Asian Women* ([2002] 2004), three contemporary Asian American actors re-enact the most emblematic Asian women on screen from the 1920s to the present in order to assess their power. These larger-than-life sexual figures are the dragon lady, the prostitute with a heart of gold, and the dominatrix—all re-presented so that their production is revealed in a kind of metaprocess. By *metaprocess*, I mean the explicit revelation of the cinema as a set of mutually constitutive relations among director, actors, and spectators within the context of popular culture. In this regard, I approach the directing relationship as a classroom where actors learn for themselves and discover their own power within the creative process. Through my actors' mimicry of Anna May Wong, Nancy Kwan, and Lucy Liu's performances in popular films and the subsequent rearticulation of the scenes with different emotion and direction, I show how Asian female actors help to author themselves as sexual beings. By showing that the actors are creative authors, I place

their performance of hypersexual Asian women in a creative collaboration and conflict with predominantly Western white male filmmakers who produce, direct, and write these roles. We must go beyond understanding Asian women who work in popular culture as simply complicit with the white male authors of popular culture. By engaging with popular culture, Asian American women actors—and their spectators—help to author themselves, bringing their own versions and interpretations of experience in collision with the white male versions of their lives. As such, I characterize popular culture as an encounter with and of power. My idea of metaprocess thus not only dramatizes spectatorship as an encounter with director, actors, and culture but also dramatizes authorship itself as always contested.

The formulation of sexuality is a significant part of my understanding of cinematic relations. It is formative in the sense of understanding our phenomenological relation to cinema as described by Vivian Sobchack in *The Address of the Eye* (1991). Directors and actors shape each other, as do the text and the spectator, in an intersubjective relationship. Thus the question about whether our work reinforces popular myths about Asian women's sexuality can only be answered if we take into account our social location and the relations that occur at both the moment of authorship and spectatorship.

As Asian American feminist filmmakers, we are not completely dominated by Hollywood versions of Asian women. Rather, we are caught in the traffic of power; industry images repress our experience but also compel our film practice and our speech. As such, the representations of explicit sex acts in my films can be understood as feminist practices. My obsession in making sexual images is compelled by fantastic representations that I find infuriating and of utmost concern. At the same time, the enterprise of making films that prioritize Asian female subjectivity is affirming. My films are about immersing myself and my Asian female characters in the messy morass of power that is sexuality and film.

HL: Asian and Asian American women are often depicted in various modes of servitude, including sexual servitude. The stereotypes of passive servant or aggressive dragon lady are both very charged, hypersexualized images—they imply that we have secrets or skills that aren't available to other women. Although I am critical of these stereotypes, at the same time I want to present strong Asian female characters whose sexuality isn't completely uninflected by these matters, whose sexuality acknowledges the popular lineage of the lotus blossom/dragon lady stereotypes without buying into them. One of the challenges is how to refigure the sexualized image of Asian women, how to make them whole and human and emo-

tionally complex, and also how to signal that their sexuality is also some-
how specific to them, to their background. I want to do this in ways that
don't smack of didacticism or give us another tiresome rehearsal of race.
For some reason people always end up in bed in my films. But it's not
like the films are headed there, that the narratives are telescoping to a
culminating sex act. Perhaps it's because sex, for me, always stands for
something, like a turning point or expression of the moment.

In my films, sexual expression or a sexual act often acts as a pivot—in
story or character or thematic terms. It's an assertion of the body, the
racialized and gendered figure who may be socially subjugated in my films.
Against this subjugation, the private, sacral moments between lovers that
I represent can't be "judged." I generally try to avoid the sexual victim-
ization of the lead character, even when the sex doesn't have a good end.
Such victimization is too easy. Sex can surely complicate matters, but it
can also clarify—it's after sex that, in *My Niagara* (1992), Julie realizes
the limits of her commonality with Tetsuro, and that the nameless main
character in *Subrosa* (2000) realizes that her longing and need for con-
nection cannot be satisfied through a casual sexual liaison with the Korean
bar owner. In *Sally's Beauty Spot* (1990), the sexual thematics of the piece
are treated lightly, allusively, and symbolically, with various almost-kisses
that lead up to the final one with the black lover that finally breaks Sally's
illusions. In *Prey* (1995), the scene in bed with Il Bae and Noel acts as a
kind of bridge for the characters to enable them to get to another stage
with each other, intimacy created via the tongue and through kissing as
well as through language. Sex is never the culmination or endpoint.

For me the most powerful moments in cinema are wordless—I re-
member images and emotions, never dialogue. This is because of film
language itself, its meanings conveyed by the style, tone, and rhythms of
the filmmaking. It's exactly in the ineffability of certain situations, the fact
that speech cannot possibly render these moments, that the beauty and
expressive capacity of cinema are best demonstrated. The sex act as rep-
resented on screen rarely feels intimate in itself (usually it works as a
signifier for intimacy—okay, they got there, we got that), and it's more
the stuff around it, getting there, that creates both the feeling of intimacy
for us and what is meaningful for the characters. Granted, sometimes talky
sex can work, especially for comedy, but then the pure viscerality of the
body becomes diminished. For those moments that in one way or another
should be moments of transcendence, speech can be intrusive. In any case,
representationally speaking, it's not how explicit or "sexy" a scene is, it's
how that kiss or exchange is shot—in a surprising or innovative or un-
expected manner—that makes it satisfying.

In *Sally's Beauty Spot*, Sally comes to realize the process of her objectification; in *My Niagara*, Julie remains stifled by daughterly devotion and haunted by the maternal specter of her mother's death by drowning; in *Prey*, Il Bae disregards sexual and social taboos by pursuing her desires and bedding a guy who shoplifts at her father's store; the character in *Subrosa* unwittingly mirrors the fate of her prostitute mother. All of these characters, their problems, their affective lives, and their issues have a sexual dimension that has an inexorable quality, propelled as it is by social circumstance or driven by personal pursuits. As a filmmaker, I try to bring a more subversive or playful quality to the sexual scenes so as to keep things ambiguous and alive. At the same time, throughout, sexual identity is always inextricably tied to racial, social dimensions of the self.

Race is always loaded on the screen—it's there, it's visible, there's a lot of baggage attached to what all the spectators bring to their particular reading of the image; it's more than any one filmmaker can calculate. I like to bring together characters of markedly different racial backgrounds in my films. In *Prey*, a cross-cultural comedy set in a Korean convenience store, Il Bae becomes even more powerfully attracted to Noel, a Native drifter with a gun in his pocket and charm to spare, after catching him shoplifting. *The Art of Woo* (2001) is a romantic comedy about a young woman who poses as an Asian heiress to find her man of means but unwittingly finds herself falling in love with her next-door neighbor, a poor but talented Native painter. Fast friends and then enemies, Alessa Woo and Ben Crowchild quit their endless sparring with a surprisingly gentle, largely mute encounter beneath translucent sheets. Though they share and genuinely connect, some secrets—like their true identities—remain secret. Alternately, I bring together Asian men who differ from the Asian Americanness of the protagonists in *Subrosa* or *My Niagara*. *Subrosa* describes the melancholic return of the prodigal daughter, a Korean adoptee looking for home. The unnamed heroine's fruitless search for her birth mother culminates in a sudden, furiously unemotional, somewhat sordid act of sexual intercourse in a seedy motel room with a Korean bar owner in Seoul. The light is red, the moment painful. Her purpose: self-obliteration. In *My Niagara*, a minimalist drama set in a water filtration plant by the lakeshore, emotional disenchantment and suburban ennui find odd—and literal—bedfellows in Julie Kumagai and Tetsuro, a stranger from Japan whose seeming familiarity has its limits when Julie discovers the foreigner within. Their bodies explore and commune in a mutual wish for transcendence, but their cultural differences divide, especially as their own private wounds remain unhealed. In both these films, I set up a collision that happens in a social and emotional sphere that's

open to numerous interpretations, whoever you are. Indeed, the one thing
that leads me as a filmmaker is what makes sense emotionally given who
my characters are.

The social engineering of these dynamics can be a trap, but at the same
time I try to use what we've come to expect typically from these characters
and to try something else as well. I want to focus on what is most con-
temporary, what's most indicative of our times, and yet remain personal
and grounded and specific. The moment that a character, or a spectator,
is caught off guard can generate a frisson in cinema, that perfect collusion
of action, framing, music, gesture, pauses, dialogue (usually very little),
blocking, and the cut. It's all about the materiality of that moment, of
embodying it with things that both encompass race/sexuality/gender—
the heady issue stuff—and the inchoate and ineffable. It's like that moment
of recognition you talk about when you see someone on screen, somebody
who speaks to you through some kind of complicated image/identity
system, and you in turn feel recognized, understood. That moment for
me as a child was when I saw Nancy Kwan in *The World of Suxie Wong*
on my television set in suburban Toronto. So much is wrapped up in that
moment of recognition, in what we have invested in it, and the stakes are
not small—image, self-esteem, representation, power, projection. And you
try to figure that out as a filmmaker, why it got you in the gut in the first
place.

CPS: The production of sexually explicit images of and by women of
color can generate race panic, in the sense of the sex panics of the 1980s
when anticensorship and antiporn platforms collided and challenged fem-
inist community and discourse. That is, within a racial critique, sexual
representations of racial subjects supposedly dangerously reify fantasies of
Asian women as always sexually available. Thus, within this framework,
Asian American feminist filmmakers representing sex as both painful and
pleasurable can be seen as self-indulgent, as engaging in a form of self-
exoticization. And for pro-sex feminists, the discussion of racial subju-
gation in sex can be seen as regressive and part of a problematic moralistic,
puritan crusade. In this framework, it's interesting that the sex acts that
would visibly confirm Asian female hypersexuality in classical and contem-
porary cinema and theater, such as *Madama Butterfly* (Puccini [1904]
1995), *Miss Saigon* (Schönberg, Maltby, and Boublil 1989), and the films
featuring Anna May Wong, Nancy Kwan, and Lucy Liu, never overtly
depict sexual interplay between racialized actors. These sex scenes are
implied and unimportant in and of themselves. They are significant in the
sense of what they produce in the film narratives—for example, biracial
babies. What I aim to accomplish by focusing on overt dramatic sexual

interaction between racialized actors is to show racial sex acts as a lived process of identity formation and thereby to challenge a visual regime in which bodies of color seem to naturally and biologically exude a particular racialized sexuality. As filmmakers, we can portray the sex act with an awareness of the ways people of color are fetishized as innately sexual. In my work, I investigate the sex act as a site where we can see how racial identities form and transform rather than simply showcase supposedly innate traits.

In the very incarnation of the racial-sexual subject in my work, the fetishistic cinematic legacy of *Slaying the Dragon* (1989) and *Picturing Oriental Girls* (1992) is never far away. From screenwriting through the work of designers, camera, and lighting crew, and in the directing/acting collaboration and the postproduction process, my filmmaking represents what can actually happen between people who are insistently projected and projected upon as sexually perverse because of their race. I recast private moments that supposedly create public identities for Asian women. I speak in explicit sex acts in order to articulate sex as a site for seeing how race and relationships can be reimagined as not just about oppression and domination but as about redemption or, perhaps, even about life-affirming, everyday pleasure practices.

I do this by taking seriously Trinh T. Minh-ha's idea of "speaking nearby" (Trinh and Chen 1994). I formulate a method of interview after I draft the scripts for my films. For my first film, *Mahal Means Love and Expensive* (1993), I observed and interviewed young college-age and mostly Filipina American women of various classes and immigrant/citizen backgrounds about the politics of sleeping around. I then crafted an aesthetic inspired by these interviews. For example, I incorporated Roman Catholic sensibilities with a set design that features altars and icons. Philippine natural disasters such as volcanic rupture informed the lighting and the color timing of the film. Unnatural disasters in colonial politics helped to shape the poetic dialogue and voice-over. Based on my interactive conversations with the interviewees, I focused on their active self-eroticization that made use of their various histories of colonialism, Catholicism, and diaspora that they brought into moments of intimacy. Like you, Helen, the results I find are transformative for the characters.

While the political goals are quite clear in my project, I find unexpected pleasure in directing sex scenes where power and subjectivity are explored. In *Super Flip* (1997), I directed Desi del Valle, who was also in your *My Niagara* (1992) and is currently a well-known actress in independent gay and lesbian film. *Super Flip* interweaves religion and sexuality, two themes that are closely associated in Latino and Filipino cultural formation. A

hyperhetero/Latino/Filipino sex scene eroticizes Catholic religious ico-
nography and the shared colonial legacies of the two lovers. I recast these
caricatures as characters by scripting a narrative about their sameness and
difference in the context of the richness of their cultures. Again, shooting
was also a process of discovery with the actors. While the scene is written
in English, we decided to shoot in Tagalog and Spanish. The actors didn't
understand each other, but it made sense in the film to use language in
this way to set up the tensions of sameness/difference in their intercourse.
It doesn't matter that these two do not understand each other's languages;
the more important point is their coming together not just as represen-
tations of two specific cultures but as bodies crossing with their individually
powerful sexual signification, revealing them to be projections they live
within this moment of intimacy.

   HL: All my films prior to and including *The Art of Woo* (2001) feature
Asian female protagonists caught up in some cross-cultural encounter.
That's the most basic generalization I can make about my work. When
someone asks, "What are your films about?" it's sometimes difficult to
answer because they are about the gaps and fissures, the preconceptions
and misconceptions, the absences and longings, and always, somehow,
about forms of racial melancholia that are like seepages in the more ob-
vious dramatic or comedic content of the films. The plot is one thing,
and the other aims of what we do—the social issues we try to engage,
though not in obviously didactic ways—are I feel our raison d'être, why
we're in this game after all.

   I'm constantly pulled by different forces in my filmmaking (I sometimes
fantasize about making genre-based action movies like Kathryn Bigelow;
I used to worship Jane Campion, and I think Claire Denis is one of the
most exciting filmmakers working today), but always there's the question
of audiences, which in feature filmmaking is not unrelated to marketing.
The Art of Woo is an extremely low-budget film but was completely fi-
nanced in an industry-oriented setting and produced through the Ca-
nadian Film Centre (CFC)'s Feature Film Project. (The CFC was founded
in 1989 by Norman Jewison and is modeled on the American Film In-
stitute in terms of its mandate to train film professionals for the industry.)
The Art of Woo is somewhat anomalous in my work, I think, but also part
of a continuum. It has obvious commercial intent, and the dramatic/
comedic situation is completely exteriorized, but it still has themes and
characters true to my previous work. The film has a romantic comedy
setting and features nonwhite lead characters. The point was to engage
with a familiar and beloved genre and to put a different spin on it, to
activate these characters and let them loose in a terrain that we associate

with Audrey Hepburn or Julia Roberts, and to bring our own things into the mix. The character of Alessa Woo is both the stereotypical Asian princess and something grittier and real; Ben Crowchild is a struggling Native painter but also a child of privilege. But none of this is presented as de facto truth; these identities are always at play and rubbing against each other throughout the film. Both characters are very aware of how they "signify" and are both resistant to and fall into preconceptions of how they are perceived as outsiders to the mainstream. Identity is at the core of the film, but it is not the issue. For some viewers it may have been an uncomfortable fit—hey, these characters are Asian but they're not acting that way (whatever that means), or the movie doesn't have obvious ethnic content that is easily consumable in the *The Joy Luck Club* (1993) way.

I'm always concerned about inside and outside, about the politics of margin and center. In Canada, as a person who goes through life ethnically inscribed but living in a place like downtown Toronto, which is probably one of the most multicultural, multiracial environments in the world, I am constantly questioning or being made aware of that ongoing flux of inside/outside. During the last five years, Korea has also been a big part of my life, and that too—looking Korean in Seoul but not speaking the language very well—has a whole different set of complications and conundrums: the transnational perspective, the whole idea of return and repatriation, immigration in reverse. I find all this incredibly stimulating as a filmmaker. I am constantly being challenged and live in a very conscious state of who, why, where I am. And because these issues were always at work in my films anyway—issues of belonging, identity, desire—it makes for a really invigorating time for me. I feel we live in an extremely interesting period of social experiment. For example, that collision of Ben, the Native character, with Halmoni, the Korean grandmother, in *Prey* (1995): now when else in history would two people like that meet? It's an unpredictable moment.

CPS: The social experiments you undertake in your filmmaking practice, such as placing seemingly incongruous characters together or racializing the subjects of romantic comedy, seem to derive from your own dilemma. Your work as a director and screenwriter illustrates how you are caught within the larger world of cinema history, on the one hand, and your own life as an immigrant, as a racialized, gendered, and sexual subject stitching those worlds together, on the other. My own film language is informed by my situation within the academy. Like Trinh T. Minh-ha, who made it possible for me to imagine life as a maker-theorist, I also work as a professor-filmmaker. The academy is conducive to reading/writing and

making, one life half lived without the other. *The Fact of Asian Women* ([2002] 2004) was informed by the classroom itself, for I shot the studio and the city sets as sites where actors as students experiment in order to gain knowledge. Teaching is very much a part of my film agenda, which involves media literacy, access to technology, the business of building an audience, and establishing venues such as feminist- and ethnic stud- ies–based distribution and production organizations that enable our work.

HL: Trinh Minh-ha was at one point my ultimate role model, almost perilously so, because I read the whole world through her *Woman, Native, Other* (1989) paradigm, and that can be stifling because, of course, there is always more than one model. But she remains incomparable, especially for combining academia and filmmaking. Despite her own critique of "influence," Trinh's eloquence as a writer and speaker and the interrog- ative character of her films became, like it or not, a standard-bearer for feminist postcolonial studies. But then my focus changed, and although I think my filmmaking is still idea based, making intellectually driven work and speaking to an elite (and small) audience became less satisfying. My first film, *Sally's Beauty Spot* (1990), emerged specifically from a desire to share theories I found personally exciting with more people, to push style and content outside the classroom. I thought it was only possible to pursue filmmaking and remain in the academy if my films were avant-garde or at least reflexive and critical in nature—in other words, expository. That mode wasn't, and still isn't, compatible with dramatic filmmaking, with the way that industry is structured, or with the timelines and kind of commitment that's necessary to succeed in dramatic filmmaking.

In terms of how one aligns oneself, I always felt closer to the feminist film context, at the same time that I was comfortable in an Asian American one—those are my roots. And I'm thankful for getting a speedy education in development issues (my first training was at DEC Films, a development education center in Toronto that had a film distribution arm specializing in social and political documentaries about the third world). My concerns were distinctly political, and I entered filmmaking in order to visualize these political issues, to animate them in a cinematic framework, to make them more accessible and possibly entertaining. Richard Fung was one of my first mentors (we worked together at DEC); when I moved to New York, Rea Tajiri, Shu Lea Cheang, Christine Chang, Yunah Hong, and Kimsu Theiler were all very important to me, as was the fact that we were this community of Asian women filmmakers. The connection and ground- ing were powerful—we understood each other's work but came from very different spaces and viewpoints, so there was both specificity and com- monality there. At the time I was employed at Women Make Movies as

the promotions coordinator, and working with their films on a daily basis. It was an incredibly vital time for me, for all of us. The desire to innovate and be radical in what we were trying to say, that was our common ground—we were all filmmakers, feminists, Asian women. Just to be with each other and see each other's work was very empowering. While working at DEC Films in the late eighties, I attended the (now-defunct) Montreal Women's Film Festival and met the executive director of Women Make Movies, Debbie Zimmerman, and my predecessor, Patricia White (who now teaches at Swarthmore College). Women Make Movies is now the world's largest distributor of feminist film and video, and I first visited their office in New York City when I started attending NYU in 1989. There, I watched Pam Tom's *Two Lies* (1989). The film, a half-hour black-and-white thesis film made at UCLA, left me thunderstruck; that someone could deal with issues personal to me—she was speaking to me—in cinematically interesting terms was a revelation. A perfect combination of style and content, *Two Lies* is about two squabbling sisters and their anxiety about their mother's eyelid surgery/sexuality, indelibly inscribed throughout with Pam's signature as a filmmaker. I respected her craft enormously. The mood and atmosphere and texture of life she was able to create in a short drama stunned me, inspired me. After that, I thought, I'd like to do this! Now, more than a dozen years on, working as a filmmaker remains interesting and completely absorbing.

The past couple of years have been varied and challenging in different ways—shooting *Subrosa* (2000) in Korea, making *The Art of Woo* (2001) in Canada, and embarking on new projects, including a video installation called *Cleaving* (2002), which was mounted at Werkleitz Biennale in Germany, and a short called *Star* (2001), which was a commissioned piece for the twentieth anniversary of LIFT (Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto). The range and variety of these projects is what has been so stimulating, as well as finding different form and expression to give to different ideas. It would be impossible for me to focus only on feature filmmaking: I'd be making only one film every five years! And, in truth, it's not as if they're rolling out the red carpet for Asian female directors in feature film land (even the success of Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* [2002] won't likely change that). I think the dividing line for opportunity here is not race but gender. The situation is extremely different for men—it's still a boy's game, especially the feature film industry. But I have no envy or bitterness or any really negative thoughts about it, because I'm grateful for who I am—if I was a white young male, who knows what I'd be making films about? Would I have anything to say?

CPS: Our films engage both feminist and Asian Americanist concerns

and practices: the lives of women at home and in diaspora as well as the context of filmmaking as a global and persistently male industry. Though my own identification is continuously in flux, I do situate myself as a feminist filmmaker of Asian American cinema. I also feel strongly enabled by the antitraditional experimental films made by women of color such as Julie Dash, Lourdes Portillo, Pratibha Parmar, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Dawn Suggs, Cauleen Smith, and Camille Billops. There is a particular political project in their films that they accomplish in different ways. However political, their work is never didactic but expressive of the forms engaged. The scene, for example, in Trinh's *Shoot for the Contents* (1991), in which the light is not on the two people in conversation but on the translator, literally illuminates the limits of translation and its mediation of meaning. I teach Cauleen Smith's short *The Message* (1990) alongside Laura Mulvey's essay on "Visual Pleasure" (1975), for it engages the concept of the male gaze through a self-reflexive black female objectification of the black male body. In *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Julie Dash puts the subjectivity of black women in the center and demands spectators occupy the position of the margins, requiring them to decenter themselves. Many of these women filmmakers also work as activists, critics, curators, and theorists. As a feminist filmmaker, I identify strongly with films made by women of color. Through my work, I incorporate the multiplicities of race, class, sex, and gender differences with experimental, documentary, and narrative film language in order to make new unbounded forms that address social problems. I try to engage the unspoken in Asian American life to prioritize feminist concerns especially around sexuality. For example, I love Jennifer Pheng's *Love Limited* (1999), in which the son and daughter both come out as gay and lesbian at the dinner table, enabling the queer in the rest of the family to emerge as well.

How does all this fit in the larger body of work we know as Asian American cinema? In the practice and teaching of this cinema, I avoid the pitfall of offering a false narrative of progress from early Hollywood films such as *The Cheat* ([1915] 1997) and *Toll of the Sea* (1922) to contemporary engagements such as Justin Lin's *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2002). Eve Oishi has accurately critiqued the myth of forward movement "from the minor to major leagues" for Asian Americans working in film. A closer look reveals that early stars such as Anna May Wong and Sessue Hayakawa were actually able to make pronounced differences in Hollywood. They were more able than actors today to protest the limits of categorization and ghettoization placed upon them. The contemporary actress Lucy Liu seems more constrained in her engagements with fan culture, very guarded in terms of her racial, gender, and sexual critique. If you look at her

interviews in fan magazines, she flippantly raises issues about exotification and the problems Asian men encounter in popular representation. While she engages these issues, she does so in a limited manner. Anna May Wong, on the other hand, raised hell and came to be known for her scathing critiques and fury regarding her roles. Where is the progress? It seems to me that we are caught within our historical context. What seems certain is that we must continually engage cultural production as a site for social struggle.

What I find so interesting, Helen, about your making *The Art of Woo* in the context of the history of both Asian American cinema and feminist cinematic progress is its challenge to the contemporary conception that "women make experimental or documentary films and men make feature narratives." Renee Tajima makes this observation in "Moving the Image: Asian American Independent Filmmaking, 1970–1990" (1991). It's almost like women perform service work documenting the community while men are able to make myths and be creative in articulating the community. As women, racialized women, it's already challenging to make the short films that we do make. From start to distribution, my budgets are about $1,000 per minute, so that the ten-minute *Mahal Means Love and Expensive* cost $10,000 and *Super Flip* cost $30,000. Some features get made for that much money. Why not go all the way, then? Where do women filmmakers get stalled? It's not for lack of gall or courage. My point is that more of us should be making narrative features as well as shorts and documentaries.

HL: Personally I'm scared as hell to make documentaries—real people, not actors, dealing with real life issues—that takes courage. It's no wonder that documentary, especially experimental autobiographical documentary, has become a realm for women filmmakers of color. It takes guts. At the same time, documentary can be a generic ghetto for filmmakers of color. If it isn't social issue–based, people aren't going to give you a chance. When someone asks me why my films are always about Asian women and will that always be my topic, they act as if it's some kind of handicap or self-marginalizing gesture. The truth is, I don't feel constrained or limited to it in any way; it's just my area of concentration, my choice of focus in a real, centered, nonsimplistic, and provocative way. Of the half-dozen stories I have circulating in my head at the moment, only one portrays a white male protagonist, and that script is being written by another screenwriter. I am constantly trying to figure out, however, how to make stories interesting and relevant to a larger population. Otherwise you're just preaching to the converted. And also how to innovate, how to both push the issue and the form. That's the trick.

I want to return to Anna May Wong. Wouldn't we all love to make a film about her life? She's incredibly fascinating and has taken on mythical proportions. And you're right that there's no progress. The lineage from Anna May Wong to Nancy Kwan to Lucy Liu—it seems like it's only in thirty-year intervals that the American public can accept a breakout Asian American movie star. I met Lucy Liu last year on the set of Vincenzo Natali's film, *Cypher* (2002), and she was surprisingly forthright and friendly. She took the initiative to greet me and my friend, the only other Asian women on the movie set, and stated her desire for material that spoke to her as a Chinese American—but not in that typical immigrant narrative mode or as the oppressed ethnic minority, obviously not! That girl is mainstream all the way, that's where her power and stardom are generated. I personally love to see her kick ass on screen. Seduction with a punch. Earlier this spring, I also met Nancy Kwan (it was a banner year) at a commemorative screening of *Flower Drum Song* ([1961] 1991) at the San Francisco Asian American Film Festival. What a touchstone she's been for me, both in terms of *Sally's Beauty Spot* (1990), which had excerpts from *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960), and the video installation, *Cleaving* (2002), which quotes the "I Enjoy Being a Girl" number in *Flower Drum Song*. We should treasure what these women (and others, such as the fabulous Margaret Cho) have given us, instead of endlessly making tiresome dragon lady critiques. That's too easy. The pleasures and conflicts are much more complicated than such a critique allows.

CPS: I love the legacy you encourage us to celebrate—to understand Anna May Wong, Nancy Kwan, and Lucy Liu as living, fighting actors caught within history and institutions. There is so much strength in the choices these actors made and also in their ghostly presences on celluloid. As an Asian woman interpellated by their images, I can't just accept them as puppets in roles whose parameters are set by others; I see the struggles they faced and continue to face as women and actors in embodying limited characters. It's amazing and powerful to watch this kind of ghostly overlapping of woman, actor, and character on screen—the fantasy and the fact of Asian women in an encounter for us to see and wrestle with as audiences. The gender continuum in history is also represented in the migration of Asian women into the West: as prostitutes, picture brides, war brides, and pen pal brides. It makes sense for us to be so obsessed with them; it is our history. In my work, I hope to represent Asian women in terms that capture both how they are imagined and imaged—and also in terms of how real women off-screen confront and live their lives in the face of the powerful fantasies established about them. In light of this, when you discuss documentary and narrative, features and shorts, and

small or large audiences—I think you are capturing an important aspect of the challenges, priorities, and problems you and I face in terms of an Asian American feminist film practice.

The way we deal with these challenges is dynamic. This is evident in terms of our most recent works, in your recasting the feature via race/sex in *The Art of Woo* (2001), or my experimental documentary, *The Fact of Asian Women* ([2002] 2004). What I know is that the spaces we occupy—me in the smaller and you in the larger arenas of the film industry—converse with each other in our culture. Together, in our different battles as Asian American women filmmakers working in different modes, we both help to build audiences concerned with the subject of Asian women not only as viable subjects on screen but also in the streets and scenes of everyday life.

I truly look forward to what the future of films by Asian American women will look like. The movement from Loni Ding, Freida Lee Mock, and Trinh T. Minh-ha to the many young women now working is something to be excited about: Grace Lee of *Barrier Device* (2002), my producer Yun Jong Suh of *We Too Sing America* (2001).

As you move further into narrative feature filmmaking, Helen, I am thankful that we can occupy these different fronts so that we can redefine the form and also shape politics from different places. I can't wait to see what you will do next and how your sensibilities will change cinematic form and how you will be changed by it. I plan to keep making experimental narrative shorts and documentaries—as well as one day, a feature—all the while teaching, reading, and writing.

HL: Celine, you must add to the teaching, reading, and writing also rearing your newborn child! I'm not sure what the future agenda of an Asian American feminist film practice is, except that we must raise the bar cinematically and in terms of content. Even just to keep going is an achievement, it's a struggle. How many women have viable careers as filmmakers—and a body of work? While a great deal has already been done, it's up to us all to always keep things moving, to keep the debates fired up and sophisticated and challenging. Maintaining the status quo is death. And the regeneration you speak about, the emerging filmmakers out there who are producing exciting new work, I can't even envision the kind of work that will be made; I'm sure it will blow our minds.

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Negar Mottahedeh

"Life Is Color!" Toward a Transnational Feminist Analysis of Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Gabbeh*

What can a transnational feminist practice contribute to our under-
standing of national cinemas?[1] While I am nominally concerned with
strategies of representation in Iranian cinema and linkages between
depictions of "fictive primitives"[2] and the use of color in the industry's
representation of "the local way of life" in this essay, my framing question
situates transnational feminist analytical practices in relation to cinematic
representations that travel—travel, that is, to international film festivals,
art houses, and commercial theaters as representatives of "national" cul-
tures. How does a feminism alert to the materiality of culture and to the
power differentials informed by the intervention of colonialism, imperi-
alism, and global capitalism in national cultures reckon with the repre-
sentations of women on-screen? How does a feminism conscious of the
interrelation between modernity and postcoloniality account for the fact
that, for many non-Western cultures, becoming modern means returning
to or inventing traditional cultural practices that are grounded in the
"national"—which is nevertheless conditioned in relation to Western
modes of modernization and capitalist processes of globalization? How

[1] My understanding of *transnationalism* draws in part on the work of Inderpal Grewal
and Caren Kaplan, who use the term to "problematize a purely locational politics of global-
local or center-periphery in favor of . . . the lines cutting across them" (1994, 13). In their
Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World they suggest that "a
transnational approach . . . emphasizes the world of connections of all kinds that do not
necessarily create similarities" between national cultures (2002, xix).

[2] Rey Chow uses the term *fictive primitive* in relation to fantasies that are "played out
through a *generic* realm of associations, typically having to do with the animal, the savage,
the countryside, the indigenous, the people, and so forth, which *stand in* for the 'original'
something that has been lost" (1995, 22). The formulation also emphasizes that the primitive
is a fictive construct, located at the site of the "phantasmagoric" and "exotic."

does one move beyond the visual impulse to read representations as signs of "realism" or "authenticity" in the historically sedimented terrain of a global medium such as film? Since it would be insolent to assume that an essay could fully respond to these questions, let me proceed instead by identifying some of the concerns that give rise to these questions.

A transnational feminist approach to film studies must aim to go beyond not only the early feminist analyses of the misrepresentation, stereotyping, and fetishization of "exotic" screen women but also the comparative practices that read films ethnographically so as to study the differing and similar ways in which contrasting national and ethnic perspectives shape the representation of gender. This cautious deflection of a sociological or ethnographically inflected reading of representation may avoid the presumptions that follow on the heels of a relativist valuation of realism or authenticity in dominant and national cinemas, an issue to which I will return shortly.

Rey Chow argues that orientalism, as "the system of signification that represents non-Western cultures to Western recipients in the course of Western imperialism, operates visually as well as narratologically to subject 'the Orient' to ideological manipulation" (1998, 171). But, if we are to believe Armand Mattelart on this matter, the other's culture is not only subject to ideological manipulation, it is also a world made and unmade by the technologies of communication (1994, 18). In this process, other cultures, "much like representations of women in classical cinema" (Chow 1998, 171), become both the produced and the fetishized objects of a masculinist Western gaze. This "racist *combinatoire*,"[3] which involves fantasies of racial sexual domination, is only amplified by the fact that, as Mattelart explains, the networks as well as the media of communication are the first materialization of the notions of "progress, civilization, the universal and universalism" (Mattelart 1994, 27). This implicates the invention of cinema in the power dynamics that have sustained the colonial enterprise and imperialism itself.

Recognizing the imperialism of the cinematic gaze does not necessarily mean, however, that a transnational feminist film analysis should mindlessly appropriate the idea that women have an innate ability to judge the authentic representation of women in other national cinemas or in their own. A transnational feminist study of film must instead assume that a native subject is as likely to create "inauthentic" representations of his or her own culture as any other national. Assuming otherwise reifies essen-

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[3] I borrow this term from Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's discussion of sexual power dynamics between the peoples of the first and the third worlds (1994, 157).

tialisms that only feed the impulse to orientalize, feminize, and fetishize other cultures through representation. Representations in foreign-language films, in other words, cannot be relied on as authentic ethnographic specimens to be considered in gender and cultural studies multicultural curricula.[4] This process by which the knowledge of the other is produced at Western universities is just one example of the kind of paradoxical practice that Ranjana Khanna has pointed to as having threatened the breakdown of transnational feminism because of a "fetishization of the local at the expense of coalition" (2001, 103). As Chow argues, "it is when critics attempt to idealize the 'other' identities claimed for 'other' cinemas that they tend to run the greatest risk of reinscribing the ideologically coercive processes of identification through suturing" (1998, 171).[5] A transnational feminist film practice must proceed in full recognition that "fictive primitives" in foreign films are just that: fictive.

Operating in a global terrain, national film cultures represent neither real identities nor uncoded realities. They create worlds. They screen fictions—fictions that are inextricably linked to dominant codes of representation, whether in opposition to or in tandem with them, while simultaneously developing a grammar of cinema that is as national as a national tongue.[6] On a very basic level, then, my concern is to anticipate a transnational feminist approach to film studies that avoids a comparativism informed by a sanguine multiculturalism, that wards itself against the celebration of authenticity in national representations by native auteurs, and that, finally, averts itself from any investment in the realism of images in national film fictions. My aim is to envision, instead, an approach preoccupied with that cinematic grammar that goes beyond the decipherment of dialogue, plot, or character and the assessment of the image track's approximation to the real. It is with these questions and concerns

[4] Poonam Arora's (1994) critique of first-world consumptions of such foreign films as *Salaam Bombay* and *Parama* is an attempt to rectify the use of fiction films by native filmmakers as ethnographic specimens of third-world cultures in gender and cultural studies classrooms in the first world. Though helpful in understanding the necessary sociohistorical background to the narratives portrayed in these films, her argument is confounded by the parameters of realism.

[5] Literally meaning to stitch up (a wound), *suture*, according to Jacques-Alain Miller's initial (1977–78) formulation, suggests the moment when the subject inserts itself into the symbolic order as a signifier in the chain of discourse, Jean-Pierre Oudart (1977) introduced the psychoanalytically informed concept of "suture" in film studies to refer to the ways in which the spectator is "stitched" into the filmic text.

[6] Kristin Thompson suggests something to this effect when she writes that alternative cinemas gain their significance and force "partly because they seek to undermine the common equation of 'the movies' with 'Hollywood'" (1985, 170).

in mind that I would like to intervene in the debates that rage around the new Iranian cinema and its colorful and brilliant representations of fictive female primitives on the international screen.

Iranian cinema has experienced substantial growth since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and has gained wide popularity in international film festivals over the last two decades. In 1992, the Toronto International Film Festival called Iranian cinema "one of the pre-eminent national cinemas in the world" (1992), a verdict that was echoed by a *New York Times* reviewer who called it "one of the world's most vital national cinemas" (Miller 1992). In 1998 Iranian cinema ranked tenth in the world in terms of output, surpassing Germany, Brazil, South Korea, Canada, and Australia and far exceeding the high-volume traditional Middle-Eastern film producers, Egypt and Turkey.

Guided by the regulations put into effect in 1982, the postrevolutionary Iranian film industry has been obliged to abide by "the rule of modesty." This rule has necessitated the wearing of scarves, veils, and loose-fitting tunics by women. Women are constrained to portrayals that uphold their dignity, avoiding activities and movements that show the contours of their bodies. However, the rule of modesty is not encoded in the strategies of veiling alone. Partially informed by a sense of unease with the imperialism of the Western gaze in cinema and by an awareness of the medium's involvement in self-representation in the global public sphere, the "commandment of looking" (prescribing the modesty of vision) aims to eradicate the stereotypical visual image of the Islamic world as a barbarous culture, fraught with exotic sexual desire. The "commandment of looking," therefore, dictates that men and women should not look at one another with desire on-screen. As a consequence of the restrictions placed on Iranian films, cinematic desexualization became the rule in the 1980s and early 1990s. Performing new, purified Islamic gender identities, cinematic technologies transformed the bodies they represented. Women's bodies, seen as vehicles of sexual desire (even when fully veiled), were represented as static and sexually undifferentiated. As we shall see later in the criticisms addressed to the film industry, particularly in the work of Shahla Lahiji, these laws had obvious representational effects.

Though the disjuncture between screen representations and quotidian life are interesting to some and, as I have suggested, a dangerous preoccupation for a feminism alert to the power differentials informing the global traversals of national cinemas, the issue I more urgently pursue in this essay is the nonrepresentational consequences of state regulations in Iranian cinema. Recognizing that the formal underwrites the representational, my concern, in other words, is the effect of modesty laws on film

form. While laws dictating modesty to the industry addressed the un-Islamic representation of women in the 1980s and 1990s, it was the formal use of the camera that became the decisive focus of censorship. In formal terms Iranian films had to avoid dominant cinema's most time-honored codes and conventions, codes identified in film theory as integral to narrative cinema's system of suture.

As an effect of certain filmic codes, such as shot–reverse-shot patterns that establish the point of view of two characters in conversation and eyeline matches that "stitch" the spectator into the film text by positioning the viewer as a film character (or alternately as someone looking at a character from a previously offscreen space), the system of suture is said to give film a sense of seamlessness. In film theory, suture is understood as the use of conventions that produce the film universe as a safe place in which the spectator feels him- or herself comfortably inscribed. Thus narrative, in dominant cinema, becomes a lure that diverts the viewer's attention away from the cinematic enunciation. This process, as Daniel Dayan (1974) argues, renders the film's signifying and production practices invisible, limiting the ability of the spectator to contend with and examine the ideological meanings and messages advanced within the illusionary universe of the film.

In her landmark work, *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983), Kaja Silverman has demonstrated how suture is virtually synonymous with the operations of classical narrative. Lighting and editing techniques combine with formal narrative compositions to stitch the viewer into the film text. In Silverman's analysis of suture the values of "absence and lack always play a central role. Those values not only activate the viewer's desire and transform one shot into a signifier for the next but serve to deflect attention away from the level of enunciation to that of fiction" (1983, 214). It is in relation to this constitution of lack that the concept of suture, for Stephen Heath (1981), enables an understanding of the image as flawed and as supplemented by the desire of the viewing subject in order to be complete. Considering any notion of the image as complete without considering its ideological interaction with the subject, is, for Heath, illusory and must be taken to task. Thus desire is seen as an ingredient in the drive that moves narrative forward.

In subsequent debates within feminist film theory, cinema itself has been viewed as the scene and setting of desire, constructing the spectator as subject and producing the subject-spectator's desire to look. The proscription of vision in Iranian cinema addresses this desire precisely. The "commandment of looking" assumes that the presence of a nonfamilial man in the audience in interaction with the figure of an unveiled, and

thereby sexualized, woman on screen constitutes an immodest, and hence reprehensible, relation of desire between the sexes. Laura Mulvey (1975) and Jacqueline Rose (1986) argue that the system of suture in dominant cinema is inextricably bound to this elemental relation of sexual difference, but differently so. In dominant cinema, in other words, the film narrative is "organized around the demonstration and interrogation of the female character's castrated condition, a demonstration and an interrogation which have as their ultimate aim the recovery of a sense of potency and wholeness of the male character and the male viewer" (Silverman 1983, 222).

In Iranian cinema, the female body stands as the site of heterosexual potency. Thus, close-ups of women and point-of-view shots that, through the gaze of the camera, allow unrelated men (in the theater) and women (onscreen) to look at one another directly violate Islamic modesty. The eye-line matches and shot patterns that are said to constitute the system of suture configure a threat to male piety in relation to a female body in which, in Islamic culture, heterosexual desire itself is said to reside. The "naked" interrogation of a woman's body implies the disintegration of Muslim male identity. In Iranian cinema, then, the viewing subject itself is at risk.

In dominant Hollywood cinema studies, limitations on vision such as modesty laws, which subvert the editorial creation of eye-line matches between characters, and shot–reverse-shot patterns that link characters together, are said to unravel spatial and temporal continuities between shots, and hence to unravel the narrative. As narrative continuity depends to a large extent on visual cues, the proscription of vision as it informs Iranian cinema in its global circulation tends to subvert conventionally unquestioned "global" cinematic systems that give a sense of cohesion and meaning to the narrative. The desexualized look, the unfocused gaze, and the long shot, all instances of the inscription of modesty in Iranian cinema, as Hamid Naficy has argued, problematize Western cinematic theories that rely on audience identification and implication achieved through the operations of suture (1994, 131–50).

Furthermore, the imposition of veiling on every woman in all circumstances (even in bed) prohibits an implicit sense of realism in the film narrative. Modesty regulations in Iranian cinema have not only problematized the theoretical givens of Western cinema studies, they have effectively forced most filmmakers to turn away from prerevolutionary themes, vexing heterosexual love relations, and issues facing contemporary urban dwellers. Effectively skewing the "authentic" or "realist" representation of women and heterosocial relations onscreen as images of the "local

way of life," such regulations have forced filmmakers to develop a new grammar of codes and conventions that have made Iranian cinema look, but more importantly speak, differently than other major film cultures. This has resulted in cinematic opportunities as well as problems of legibility. Here, Mohsen Makhmalbaf is illuminating about the possibilities of speaking to an Iranian audience in a visual language. Elaborating on the difference between Iranian cinema and other world cinemas, Makhmalbaf tells an interviewer:

> I see [this] whenever we use montage or a metaphor that denotes a single meaning. Then the [Iranian] spectator is capable of grasping the meaning of the image . . . but as soon as the representation carries a plurality of meaning . . . the spectator fails to understand. . . . Sometimes the language of cinema is spoken by using shadows. . . . Sometimes the language of the image rests in the use of the [camera] lens. . . . It's the effect of repetition and pedagogy and the becoming cliché [of a technique] that [allows] the majority [of the audience] to get it. . . . But when the language of the cinema speaks through framing, by way of broken [sight] lines or direct ones, or by using color or mise-en-scène, or through the relationship between objects within the frame, or by [the use of] light, or [by the use of visual] concept[s], not one person understands.[7] (Makhmalbaf 1996–97, 139–47)[8]

Dominant cinema's preoccupation with "realism" continued its influence on Iranian directors, however. For most directors, shifting the camera away from urban settings allowed a more "believable" depiction of the "new" ideal of Islamic Iran. In making village films set in fictive rural and real village locations, filmmakers could avoid the problem of modesty in dress. In contrast to urban women, who would need to be screened in interior spaces and made to wear large outer garments in conformance to modesty laws but counter to actual contemporary practice, toiling peasants and rural women could be imagined outdoors in rural spaces, wearing head scarves and colorful garments that were nevertheless congruent with

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[7] Makhmalbaf attributes this lack of understanding to the fact that "the language of cinema arrives by way of, and is borrowed from, [Western traditions of] painting." And, he continues, "Iranian film audiences are not familiar with painting This is why Iranian filmmakers must be answerable to the fact that a whole people are uneducated in the history of Western visual arts" (1996–97, 139–47).

[8] The year of publication, 1996–97 in the Gregorian calendar, corresponds to 1375 in the Islamic calendar.

the regime's dictates of modesty. The authoritarian language of Islam that was to give shape to the new language of Iranian cinema by resituating vision was thereby displaced to a fantasmatic site on which it could have little ideological effect. New conventions developed as allegorical embodiments of state-imposed regulations.[9] "Village films," which fabulated the life and labor of fictive primitives, were one adaptation of this new embodiment. They provided for the industry's continued will to create reality effects while making a cinema that was more linguistically and scopically diverse, more brilliant and colorful than ever before.

Perhaps the most stereotypical marker of the new Iranian cinema in the West, other than the effects of censorship, is its description as an industry attached to color—that is, to the abundant use of color in representing sweeping landscapes, peasant life, and nomadic existence. These cinematic representations, promoted by the national industry, occur in such films as Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Gabbeh* (1996), *The Silence* (1998), and *Kandahar* (2001); Abbas Kiarostami's Rostamabad trilogy—*Where Is the Friend's Home?* (1987), *Life and Nothing More* (1992), and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994)—and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999); and Majid Majidi's *The Color of Paradise* (2000) and *Baran* (2001). They have come under scrutiny both within the country and in the diaspora. Watching the success of the industry in film festivals around the globe, critics repeatedly argue that the films depict unrealistic representations of Iran and its "way of life."[10]

Central to these critiques, once again, is the Iranian film industry's problematic representation of women. In the Iranian context and increasingly in the West, a particular mode of critique introduced by Iranian feminists articulates the shift from prerevolutionary cinematic depictions of women as "unchaste dolls" to the "chaste dolls" of the postrevolutionary period. Lahiji's work on the representation of women in Iranian films is at the forefront of these critiques, suggesting that "the unchaste dolls" of the prerevolutionary cinema were banished from the cabaret stage and are now chastened and confined within the interior walls of the kitchen and engaged in domestic chores (2002, 215–23). While these critiques of the stereotypical representations of women may be seen as

[9] See Chaudhuri and Finn 2003, 48, regarding this reading of Iranian films as allegories informed by the conditions of the film industry. I would also like to thank the graduate students Amal Dilantha Dayaratna, Abigail Lauren Salerno, and Shilyh Warren in my contemporary Iranian cinema class in the literature program at Duke University (spring 2003), for their insights on the film industry and for giving shape to this remarkable reading of allegory.

[10] See, e.g., Farahmand 2002.

progressive in the context of a national industry that is charged by its government with propagating, through film, proper standards for Islamic life to a vastly illiterate population, the films become quite problematic as they make the rounds of international film festivals.

Lahiji's critique of the stereotypical female in the new cinema evokes, albeit negatively, Stephen Neale's discussion of the stereotype in the study of race and ethnicity in film. Neale's (1979) work suggests that the study of stereotypes necessitates an analysis of narrative structure, genre conventions, cinematic styles, and attention to broader practices of filmic production. I want to argue here that a transnational feminist practice of reading films must go beyond questioning whether narrative and filmic representations are authentic and positive images of Iranian women. Rather, we need to attend to the codes, conventions, and effects particular to cinema and to ask what specific filmic conventions are used to construct the Iranian woman in film in the first place. This is because, as Robyn Wiegman has argued, even positive images can be "as pernicious as degrading ones" (1998, 165).

Lahiji claims that, in the postrevolutionary Iranian context, the stereotypical depiction of women onscreen has more recently been challenged by the work of female filmmakers who "chose to object to the unrealistic image of women in Iranian cinema" by presenting women in a more realistic light. She argues that "the international reception of [their] approach [to representation has] finally persuaded their male colleagues to reappraise their own work" (2002, 224) and attributes this realistic portrayal of women and of their role in Iranian society to the widespread positive reception of Iranian films around the globe. In Lahiji's discourse the stereotype is countered by realism, and realism is posited as the condition for the industry's economic success internationally.

This reliance on realism as truth presupposes that cross-cultural encounters in film follow a universal protocol. However, orientalist travel discourses and imagery precede and pervade the field of contact. Thus what realism means in the framework of Western cinematic representations signifies differently in the reception of third-world films. Consider, for example, the "new cinemas" as they are constituted on the film festival circuit. In the case of Iranian cinema, the Farabi Cinema Foundation of Iran permits only a particular type of art film to enter international film festivals; thus only those directed by a handful of acclaimed filmmakers and their apprentices get screened.[11] In the context of extreme power

[11] The Farabi Cinema Foundation was established in 1983, and its activities cover all aspects of cinema and the film industry. Farabi produces films, gives low-rate loans, supplies

differentials, the selection of films in French, Italian, British, and North American festivals, while formally grounded in the argument of "aesthetic brilliance," is as much shaped by the products' relation to known avant-garde and modernist film traditions as by the racist *combinatoire*'s potential for commercial profit. It is within this context that an Iranian auteur such as Kiarostami can be promoted as nothing less than a genius, his primitivism the marker of a difference that, regardless, situates him in a genealogical relation to the metropolis as a direct descendant of François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, and Roberto Rossellini.[12] Put bluntly, the fundamental factors that inform the film festival encounter and the shaping of knowledge in that experience are profitability and festival politics.

While it is undeniable that Iranian cinema has been recently appropriated into the canons of global cinema, the corollary to this reception and recognition must be that this has to do with "the forms of engagement" that these films induce and "make available" to a Western audience (see Ganguly 1996). These engagements, as I have attempted to emphasize, are radically informed by the conflictual histories and the struggles of the cinema on a turf that has as much to do with standardized codes of representation as with the resistant practices of a national industry in its encounters with dominant cinemas around the globe. But whether these cross-cultural encounters situate Iranian cinema in stereotypical orientalist terms that tend to appreciate the industry's products for their abundant use of color, sweeping landscapes, and peasant women toiling outdoors, or fetishistically look to the screen's "realistic" representation of assertive, engaged, and self-sufficient Iranian female characters, what needs to be carefully attended to are the ways in which both approaches promote the conception of a "universal" knowledge derived from differentially situated conceptions of truth.

Ellen Strain's 1996 article on the prehistory of cinema and its appro-

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raw materials, lends camera equipment, provides postproduction facilities, publishes various cinematic literature, and sponsors film festivals. Farabi is also responsible for promoting and marketing Iranian cinema all over the world. Its international activities include introducing Iranian films to festivals, the screening of these films in different countries, participating at film markets, and world sales of Iranian motion pictures. Farabi enters coproduction projects with foreign producers as well and is the exclusive importer of movies for theatrical and video release in Iran. Through years of productive activity the Farabi Cinema Foundation has established itself as the major organization involved in domestic film industry and the main representative of Iranian cinema abroad. Regarding which Iranian films actually get screened in the West, see Naficy 2001, 162, 175–92, and Farahmand 2002.

[12] As Shohini Chaudhuri and Howard Finn argue, "The appeal of New Iranian Cinema in the West may have less to do with 'sympathy' for an exoticized 'other' under conditions of repression than with self-recognition" (2003, 57).

priation of the posture of distance and objectivity in relation to cultural difference—a posture that Strain argues was adopted from the popularization of the touristic experience as well as the professionalization of such fields as anthropology—is instructive in this regard and bears quoting at length. Looking at the history of cinema, Strain writes that "the notion of touristic viewing as an historically-specific phenomenon which developed in the decades immediately preceding cinema's inception" (1996, 72) was imported into cinema in its formative years: "While fascination with imagined beasts and fantastic human oddities inhabiting the globe's furthest corners stretches back over centuries, touristic experience—whether simulated or actual—brings the Western subject face to face with the spectacle of difference, the exotic landscape dotted with wondrously 'alien' human and animal faces" (72). Situating this distanced and indirect relation to difference in a worldview that was to mature by the turn of the century, Strain continues:

> This capitalist view of the world as a reservoir of products, raw materials, and experiential pleasures melded with scientific understandings of the universe and a technological confidence on the part of the West. One outcome was the learned pleasures of the touristic as defined by the visual objectification or the conversion of the cultural Other into spectacle; the separation of the tourist from the toured; and the identification of the tourist with a figure of mastery such as the explorer, colonialist soldier, or anthropologist. . . . The marketing of touristic pleasures in the pre-cinematic era helped popularize . . . a set of strategies which can only be analyzed in the context of a culturally-shared world view and late nineteenth-century developments, including the professionalization and popularization of anthropology, improved transportation, the consolidation of capitalism, and the cultural ascendancy of the mechanically-produced image. (1996, 71–72)

By genealogically positioning the ethnographic posture within strategies that situate difference in relation to both academic knowledge production and mechanically produced images of the other, Strain implicates not only feminist film ethnographies but also feminist practices in multicultural curricula. At risk are not only the constitutive problematics of objectification and fetishization in relation to the other—the very assumption of representation as truth also hangs in the balance.

To me, the critical issue at the heart of our understanding of cross-cultural readings of representations as truth is the reliance on the category

of realism—a realism deeply embedded in the narrative and representa-
tional logic of dominant cinema and in the history of Western perceptions
of the technologized image of the other. David Desser's reading of Jap-
anese fiction films shows, for example, how dominant conventions of
realism (which are often determined by continuity editing, spatial ar-
rangements, and the use of color) are rejected by Japanese cinema, a
cinema that, he argues, finds its roots in traditional nonrealist art forms
(1994, 308). Japanese cinema is only one of many examples in which a
resistance to realism signals a rejection of the imperialist power of dom-
inant cinema and an attempt to root cinematic traditions or innovations
in extant national art forms. If we come to understand the conventions
of realism as a historical imprint of an imperial logic on nondominant
cinemas, can "realism" still stand as the measure of transnational feminist
film analyses?

In the context of Hollywood's imperial domination of what constitutes
value in film, namely narrative realism, a transnational feminist critique of
Iranian cinema cannot be forwarded by merely suggesting that stereo-
typical representations be replaced and thus undercut by realist represen-
tations. It is by recognizing, rather, that in the global circulation of col-
orful, fictive primitives on screen, what Iranian films offer up to knowledge
is not an access to the knowledge of the real beyond representation but
"a negative return on an absolute investment" in representation as truth
(Ganguly 1996). While a simplistic articulation of this formula would have
it that if there is a camera there, what you see onscreen cannot possibly
be real, its corollary in a transnational feminist analytics of third-world
cinema is the recognition that "realism" stands as a discursive alibi for an
authentic encounter with difference.

At this point, let me turn to a discussion of the function of color in
film and its relation to the particular aura attached to Iranian cinema in
its circulation around the globe. I would like to work through the specifics
of the argument by considering one of Iranian cinema's most lauded
commercial art films, *Gabbeh*, directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf in 1996.
Originally conceived as a documentary on the Qashqa'i nomads and their
practice of weaving *gabbeh* rugs, the fiction film, *Gabbeh*, revolves around
the courtship of a young nomad named Gabbeh and her horseback-riding
lover who are prevented by a domineering tribal father from forming a
union. While the lover is only seen in long shot, there are insistent close-
ups of the female protagonist, Gabbeh—certainly a "fictive primitive" (her
dubbed voice-over narration reminds us that the character is played by
an actress with a distinct Tehrani accent).

The central obstacle to the union between Gabbeh and her horseback rider is the arrival of Gabbeh's older uncle. An urban schoolteacher whom we first encounter in a nomadic school tent giving a lesson on color, Gabbeh's uncle comes to the tribe to visit his mother after many years of absence and to find a suitable bride. The uncle's arrival coincides with the death of his mother, Gabbeh's grandmother. The tribe proceeds to mourn her death by weaving a rug that narrates the day of the event and the day of the uncle's arrival. His mother lost, the uncle goes in search of a wife, and since he is Gabbeh's elder, Gabbeh's courtship with the distant horseback rider is, by rite, delayed. Gabbeh's mother gives birth. A kid goat disappears in the mountains, and Gabbeh's younger sister dies in search of it. It rains, and the rugs must be collected and protected. Each of these events delays Gabbeh's union. Furthermore, the events are not represented in chronological order. Rather, seen in terms of the "past" or "future," each is intercut with sequences staged in a seemingly timeless "present" that takes place on a riverfront where an elderly couple engages Gabbeh in a conversation about her life. Asked about her kin, Gabbeh launches on the story that becomes the film narrative.

Gabbeh, then, is an atemporal narrative that is structured formally by the storytelling practices of the *gabbeh* weavers themselves. The film forms constellations among the past, present, and future by adopting the processes of weaving, cutting, and dyeing the color threads, associated in the film image and intercut throughout with the work and storytelling practices of the nomadic tribal women. As the women and children weave the *gabbeh* rugs, they intermittently turn to the camera with a sometimes celebratory cry: "Life is color!" "Woman is color!" "Man is color!" In Makhmalbaf's remarks to Hamid Dabashi about *Gabbeh*—a film that marks, for the director, the beginning of the fourth phase in his filmmaking—the director states that it is with the film *Gabbeh* that "light begins to enter" (Dabashi 2001). Light, perhaps, but it is more specifically color that enters. But what does it mean to say that color enters?

In the history of cinema, the use of color was seen as a "problem for realism" because, as Neale notes, "colour could distract and disturb the eye" (2002). As Neale explains, because of its capacity to disrupt, color eventually had to be submitted to "rules and conventions governing the relative balance between narrative, on the one hand, and spectacle on the other, since what colour tended to provide, above all else, was spectacle" (2002, 87). Color as spectacle was thought to distract the eye from the elements that bring unity to the narrative: acting, facial expression, and the film's action (Neale 2002, 85). With the introduction of color and

its excessive use, narrative was thought to come to a halt and spectacle
to take over. The containment of color ensured narrative continuity. Its
proper governance became a convention of classical narrative film practice.

While *Gabbeh* is anything but a classical narrative in form, it attempts
to produce a national narrative form in film. It does so by attaching the
continuity of its own narrative practice and closure to the processes in-
volved in the making of the *gabbeh* rugs, the spinning, dyeing, piling,
weaving, and cutting of color threads by young tribal women (plate 1, p.
1425). Thus color filmmaking in *Gabbeh* is self-reflexively tied to the
process involved in the piling and cutting of color threads, a historical
association with women's labor that recalls the fiction film pioneer Georges
Méliès's practice of employing an army of young women to hand paint
each of his film frames (Desser 1994, 304). Thus, although *Gabbeh* is a
lesson on the construction of a film form emergent from national narrative
forms, one could also say that, in its use of a formal practice primarily
associated with women's labor (the application of color to construct stories
in both celluloid and rug), the film anachronistically suggests itself as the
enunciative site of color film production. Furthermore, if, as *Gabbeh* sug-
gests formally, color film is produced according to the same processes as
color application in rugs, then the nature of color's cinematic represen-
tations (like that of the *gabbeh* rugs) must be understood as metaphorical
or allegorical rather than as ethnographically "realistic." While color is
recognized as an integral part of both the matter being represented on-
screen and of the rug itself, and thus implicated as a narrative element,
color is also disclosed as a process that requires application and labor. As
spectacle in *Gabbeh*, color is a consciously applied element that disrupts
narrative realism and its implied indexical relation to the real world outside
the film. This said, let me turn directly to the narrative and the sites in
which color and its relation to "weaving" are represented as metaphor
and allegory, not only in the processes of rug making but also for the
processes of storytelling and life itself.

Set by the side of a stream, the scene that is perhaps most consequential
for both *Gabbeh*'s narrative continuity and its closure is one in which the
daughter of Alladad accepts Gabbeh's uncle's marriage proposal. This
scene is also structurally significant. When the uncle approaches his future
bride, she sings a poem that she has written the night before. Here, in
the Turkish lyrics of the song written by Alladad's daughter (the "singing
canary by a stream" that Gabbeh's uncle has seen in his dreams), we find
an intimation of the way that characters are constructed in the film. At
the uncle's request, she recites the lyrics anew, translating them from the
Turkish dialect to Persian in the following words: "I am the beginning

of the stream / And its end too / I am amongst the pebbles of the stream itself / My beloved passed by and / I was the sparrow in that lover's hand / I was divided in three." At this moment of romantic union, the future bride reveals a split subjectivity that extends into the entire film and far beyond the singularity of her specific character.

This encounter between the uncle and his future bride is intercut with another scene of primary importance to the comprehension of the narrative and, particularly, to its use of color and its emphasis on the allegorical process of rug weaving. Paradoxically, this scene both introduces and recalls the primary love story of the film. A young blue-veiled girl sits with the old man and woman whom we have seen at the film's beginning fighting over who is to wash the *gabbeh* rug that represents in its pattern a man and woman fleeing on horseback. The blue-veiled girl calls herself Gabbeh and tells the couple that her mother and father are the warp and weft out of which she has been woven. She is, we realize, not only the young woman in love with a wild horseback rider but also the rug, her life story woven into its sky-blue background. But, as the film progresses, we grasp that she is the old woman too. We come to understand that the old man, who at once rejects his old wife and adores the young girl, Gabbeh, is the handsome, howling horse rider who follows the young girl's tribe and finally elopes with Gabbeh against her father's wishes. In this scene by the stream, the past, present, and future form an allegorical constellation through the colored threads of the *gabbeh* rug. The old man, his wife, and Gabbeh are in an ambiguous present that looks at once toward the past and also toward the future bickering of the eloped couple. And, paralleling the lover's song sung by Alladad's daughter, they are also divided in three.

Set by a stream and in an ambiguous "present," their exchange is gradually intercut with the scene of the uncle's marriage proposal to Alladad's daughter. Time and space are woven together by desire. Enchanted by the young blue-veiled Gabbeh, the old man sometimes doubles the uncle's actions. The young girl, Gabbeh, impatient to have her turn in marriage, does everything in her power within the "present" frame to move the "past" marriage proposal along. She extends a bouquet of yellow flowers out of the frame—flowers that the camera has shown the uncle bring into the frame during the school lesson he has taught on color in a previous sequence. The past of the film itself intercuts the filmic present as the narrative present intervenes in the future-past. We come to recognize, in the midst of the courting sequence, that the present is capable of influencing the past. Tearful, the young Gabbeh announces that it is time for the uncle's wedding and begs the old man to let go of the sparrow

he holds in his hand so that it can become the singing canary in the uncle's frame—the yellow canary that will, in his dream, lead him to his future wife (plate 2, p. 1425). The uncle's happiness in the future-past has an impact on Gabbeh's quest for union with her beloved horseman in the present-past.

The Turkish poem that attracts the uncle to the stream captures the tripartite division of identities in the film: Gabbeh is simultaneously the young blue-veiled girl on one side of the stream, the old woman on the other, and the soaking rug that reflects their collective narrative history. She is no less a memory of a love that still flutters before the old man as his hands shake and his voice trembles in singing his desires. Gabbeh's life is the film's translation of the rug's narrative and its colorfully inter-woven and multiple temporalities. These formal moves in the construction of the narrative have implications for the ways in which we understand the use of "unrealistic stereotypes" in the representational strategies of this film. Although the film's setting in rural Iran aims to produce reality effects, what the representational strategies of the film seem to undo is the very notion of representational realism as the language of Iranian cinema. The film unsettles the codes of dominant cinema while simul-taneously positing the film narrative itself as having roots in the very narrative forms it foregrounds. These forms are continuously associated with women's cultural productions and their use of color as they poetically weave their collective narrative histories into *gabbeh* rugs.

Realism in dominant cinema, we should recall, is not only about rep-resentational strategies embedded in specified notions of indexicality, icon-icity, and realism, and their relation to "truth." Realism in film rests on narrative continuity. As Heath has argued, for narrative to maintain its unity and its spatial—and, by implication, temporal—continuity in film, there must be rigid attention paid to specific codes and conventions and, indeed, to the processes of suture (1976). In *Gabbeh*, these standard conventions of narrative continuity and their spatial and temporal con-stituents are interrupted by processes associated with the use and pro-duction of color in weaving, as if the film narrative—its progression from frame to frame, shot to shot—is constituted like the patterns of *gabbeh* rug out of piles of color.

In the key sequences discussed in this essay, in which the narrative attempts a forward movement toward the consummation of at least two heterosexual relationships, what interrupts the narrative telos is color. Here, a school lesson in color stalls the uncle's marriage proposal. Girls carrying bouquets, responsible for the processes of color extraction from prairie plants, interrupt Gabbeh's impassioned attempt to run away with

her courting horseback rider(plates 3, 4, p. 1425). The color dyeing processes undertaken by Gabbeh and her tribe's younger women halt Gabbeh's marriage by deferring the scene of the uncle's union. The processes of spinning and weaving the colored threads to produce narrative patterns on the *gabbeh* rug cinematically suspend the consummation of the uncle's marriage to Alladad's daughter and its final celebration against the backdrop of the tent and the blackboard on which the uncle's lesson in color takes place earlier in the film. The production and spectacle of color disrupt narrative continuity in the film, and in doing so they fracture the film's reliance on the habitual touchstone of realism in cinematic discourse. The embodied materiality of color continuously defers time in the film narrative, reminding us that what we are seeing is, in fact, fiction.

Here the plot, which in classical narrative cinema is driven by the chronologically bound development and consummation of heterosexual love, is interrupted as well. Jane Gaines maintains that classical cinematic form works on the principle of heterosexual realism, "producing visual norm and sexual norm simultaneously through reassuring repetition of scene and frame, as well as through 'seamless' editing and other illusionistic techniques" (1995, 404). Appropriating the structural form of the poem written by Alladad's daughter and its tripartite constitution of the subject, *Gabbeh* resists the visual norm. The film's rejection of seamless temporal and spatial editing techniques, and implicitly of the spatial and temporal boundaries of the worlds it narrates, undoes the work that aims to constitute unified projections of identity in dominant cinema. The film develops its own narrative codes and conventions, informed, on the one hand, by the dictates of modesty that allegorize themselves in the displacement of the obviously urban, Tehrani-accented actress who plays the role of the nomadic fictive primitive, and, on the other, by a formal "return" to fictively national as well as extant local narratological traditions associated with the poetics of color.

The technology of film immerses itself in the world of weaving, taking the formal structures of the rug's storytelling as its own. Appropriating the repetitious processes of spinning, dyeing, cutting, and weaving colored threads as the very form of narrative construction, the cinematic narrative splits and folds onto itself, repeating shots, cutting spaces and strands of film together irrespective of the spatial or temporal continuities and unified narrative identities that are implicated by the system of suture. Past, present, and future, the here and the there, the I, you, and she, form constellations. The shifting multitemporal narrative threads of the rugs become the constitutive elements of the cinematic narrative in *Gabbeh*, replacing the markers that typically communicate cinematic fictions be-

tween the suppressed producer of the fiction itself and an embodied spectator produced by the fiction through the seamless—rather than obviously woven—conventions of suture.

Thus color functions to escape, subvert, and disrupt the conventional "symbolic organization to which it is subject" (Kristeva 1980, 221; see also Kristeva 1998b). As an instance of Julia Kristeva's "paragrammatic," the use of color becomes the site in which "the prohibition foresees and gives rise to its own immediate transgression" (1980, 221). In this sense, as Kristeva has argued, "colour achieves the momentary dialectic of law—the laying down of One Meaning so that it might at once be pulverized, multiplied into plural meanings. Colour is the shattering of unity" (1980, 221). But let me emphasize that what occurs in *Gabbeh* is the shattering of particular kinds of unity: the unity of identity, spatiality, and temporality on which the convention of narrative realism in film relies. The shattering of the image is not the shattering of false illusions or of the stereotypic representation of tribal primitives. Nor is it an attempt to represent the nomad in her true from. Rather, color is used to unsettle the ways in which the fictive primitive is positioned, commodified, and fetishized as a coherent, unified identity accessible beyond the fiction and the spatiotemporal limits of the film. The use of color addresses itself to the codes and conventions that drive the plot forward and that attempt through the system of suture to create realism by way of temporal and spatial continuities.

The deliberate association of the representational film frame, its opening onto the looms that form the warp and weft of the rugs, organically suggests the nonindexical nature of representation in the film. While admittedly the film's color is photographically achieved, its reflexive association with the application processes involved in producing the narrative histories represented by the rug weavers suggests its own use of color as nonindexical and "purely sensual." The film's color process is thus historically matched to processes of hand painting, stencil coloring, and combinations of tinting and toning in film "whose role," Tom Gunning observes, "is less realistic than spectacular and metaphorical" (1994). Thus color as the result of a technologically achieved process is paradoxically articulated by the film form as a narrative element that is materially integral to the bodies and labor of its fictive primitives. But the association of the film's production process with the labor involved in the extraction and application of color also situates its colorful representations as visually autonomous and nonidentical to the real, which is always narratively constructed and colored by history, culture, and desire. The fictive primitives are thus lifted from the realm of the real to the paragrammatic

arena of color—an arena that defies and decenters logic and law while simultaneously inviting the lure of spectacle and investments in commodity fetishism.

Gabbeh breaks with the dominant system of suture, articulating a different approach to the narrative order altogether. As Silverman argues, "Suture functions not only constantly to interpellate the viewing subject into the same discursive positions, thereby giving that subject the illusion of a stable and continuous identity, but to rearticulate the existing symbolic order in ideologically orthodox ways" (1983, 228). Born out of color, *Gabbeh*'s narrative is not a "lure" constructed through the interlocking of point-of-view shots and first-person narration to entrap the viewer and to erase the marks of enunciation in the film. Filmic enunciation, ripped from its fictive attachment to the gaze of a unitary subject, is attached instead to a panorama of dislocating perspectives associated alternately with individual, collective, and inanimate systems of production. It is exposed and categorically immersed in the productive and colorful labor of tribal women. This insistence on the foregrounding of color, despite the threat of narrative disintegration posed by its spectacle, fixes the celluloid and the narrative in the weave of color just as the rug's colorful patterns that serve as the film's own loom are fixed by water. Color in *Gabbeh*, then, would seem to be an organic response to dominant and standardized codes of narrative realism—regulatory cinematic codes that the inscription of socially regulatory modesty laws in postrevolutionary cinema have ironically transgressed and subverted.

Depending on new grammar that can adequately speak the national condition for Iranian cinema, *Gabbeh* intimates simultaneity in the face of the demands for narrative chronology and continuity editing in dominant cinema. Representing to Makhmalbaf the national potential for the development of a new film language in Iranian cinema, *Gabbeh* cuts spaces, times, and selves together, synthetically producing a film that subverts rigid and reified hegemonic notions of identity and culture produced under the capitalist mode of production, a mode of production of which the standardized codes for realism in cinema are an integral part. In this gesture of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, the film embraces the disruptive potential of color, thus shaping its address ambivalently somewhere in the cracks of incommensurable national narrative forms— poetry, weaving, singing, and teaching—that, precisely for their incommensurability with dominant realist codes, become constitutive elements of a film celebrated as spectacle in its global reception at film festivals, art houses, and retrospectives.

If color is what Iranian films are celebrated for, then so be it. For this

very strategic use of color undermines the formal structures and cinematic conventions that have repeatedly lodged the stereotypical primitive in a specifically Western cinematic discourse by relying on the conventions of realism as a coefficient of cultural truth. Escaping "the lure of narrative," *Gabbeh* boldly ties itself to an unruly practice that is disruptive not only in its production of a differing *chronos* but also in its "paragrammatization," which "points to the dislocation into fragments" (Kristeva 1998a, 151) of realist codes and indexical expectations that are doubly inscribed in relation to representations in third-world films.

The burden of the colorful fictive primitive as she encircles the globe is not, it would seem, to represent a real beyond representation but to self-consciously question the standardized narrative forms and conventions that have structured her representation as mimetic and indexical in dominant cinema. Her global circuit performs a discursive disclosure, no less comparable to the analytical practice of film feminisms than to the nomadic projects of their transnational counterparts. Recognizing the complex ways in which representations are constituted by dominant conventions of cinematic realism and encouraging practices that may teach us ways to unlearn them are tasks to which a transnational feminist discourse on the global track of national cinemas should more carefully attend.

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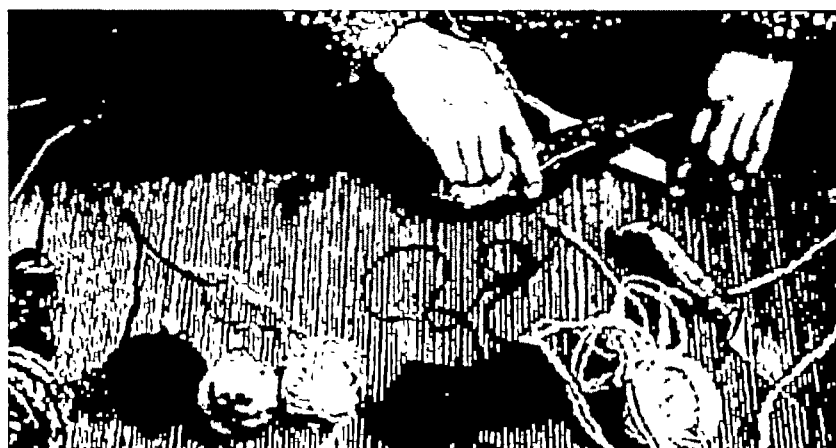
Plate 1 *Gabbeh* (1996), directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf Courtesy of Negar Mottahedeh Appropriating the processes of spinning, cutting, and weaving colored threads, the film narrative splits and folds onto itself, repeating shots and cutting spaces and strands of film together. See Negar Mottahedeh, "'Life Is Color!'" p 1416

Plate 2 *Gabbeh* (1996), directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf Courtesy of Negar Mottahedeh. It rains, and the rugs must be collected and protected, delaying Gabbeh's union See Negar Mottahedeh, "'Life Is Color!'" p. 1418
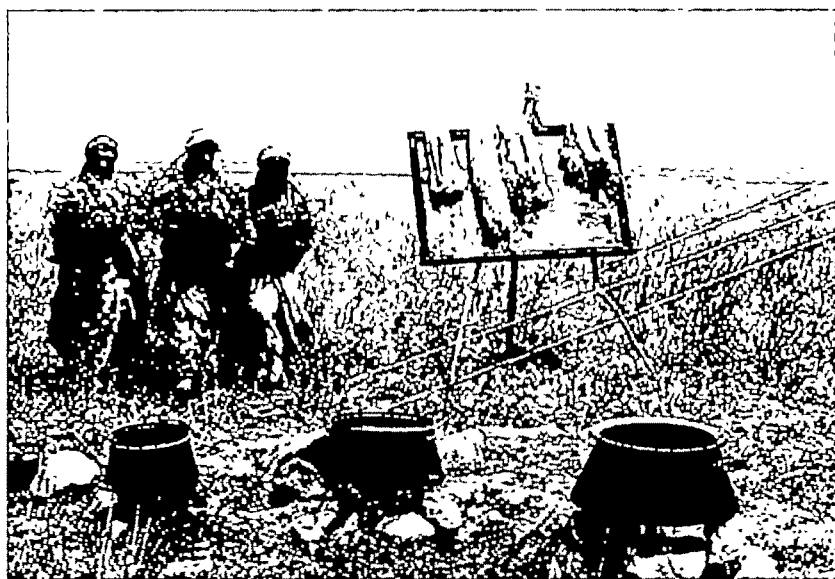
Plate 3 *Gabbeh* (1996), directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf Courtesy of Negar Motta-
hedeh See Negar Mottahedeh, "'Life Is Color!'" p 1419 Girls carrying bouquets interrupt

Plate 4 . Gabbeh's impassioned attempt to run away with her courting horseback
rider See Negar Mottahedeh, "'Life Is Color!'" p 1419

Plate 5   Fatimah Tuggar, *Fusion Cuisine* (2000). Video stills. Produced at the Kitchen, New York   Courtesy of BintaZarah Studios. See Nicole R. Fleetwood, "Visible Seams," p. 1429

Plate 6   Fatimah Tuggar, *The Lady and the Maid* (2000)   Photocollage. Courtesy of BintaZarah Studios. See Nicole R. Fleetwood, "Visible Seams," p. 1438.

Plate 7 Fatimah Tuggar, *Robo Makes Dinner* (2001). Photocollage Courtesy of BintaZarah Studios See Nicole R. Fleetwood, "Visible Seams," p 1438.

Plate 8 Fatimah Tuggar, *Fusion Cuisine* (2000) Video stills Produced at the Kitchen, New York. Courtesy of BintaZarah Studios. See Nicole R. Fleetwood, "Visible Seams," p. 1441.

Visible Seams: Gender, Race, Technology, and the Media Art of Fatimah Tuggar

Media artist Fatimah Tuggar's video *Fusion Cuisine* (2000) unveils connections between historical and present Western narratives of technological progress, racialized and gendered subjectivity, and globalization. Specifically, the artist's work illustrates how these issues coalesce through visual representational practices such as television commercials, Hollywood film, and product design. *Fusion Cuisine*, coproduced with the Kitchen (an experimental nonprofit arts center in New York), playfully reveals cold-war American fantasies of consumer technology as gendered emancipation and national progress while exposing the racial and geographic erasures that form the basis of these visions of the future.[1] The video consists of two sets of footage: post–World War II American commercials advertising domestic technologies and targeted toward white American middle-class women and contemporary footage of African women videotaped by the artist in Nigeria. *Fusion Cuisine* shifts continuously between the archival filmstrips of postwar fantasies of modern life and suburbia and more recent images of domestic work and play in Nigeria. This visual and sound collage moves through several scenes, locations, and temporal moments and, as the artist states, "toggles back and forth between these worlds, creating a constantly shifting space, asking: What happened to the dreams of the future and 'the kitchen of tomorrow'? Are we there yet?" (Tuggar 2000; plate 5, p. 1427).

Fusion Cuisine is an example of Tuggar's digital video and photomontage art, which employs contemporary technology to comment on the history of technological development and the fantasies and nationalist imperatives invested in these movements. Tuggar produced *Fusion Cuisine*—a medley of clever kitsch images from the advertising and technological past of the United States, and contemporary ethnographic-style footage of Nigeria— on site at the Kitchen, referencing the history of that organization. The

[1] The exhibit *Fatimah Tuggar: Fusion Cuisine* ran from September 28, 2000, through October 21, 2000, at the Kitchen in New York City.

Kitchen, founded by video and performing artists, literally began in a kitchen in 1971, and its mission continues to be to support multidisciplinary artists and experimentation. The arts center served as Tuggar's lab for domestic experimentation just as the modern kitchen was promoted for the suburban housewife in cold-war advertising. In one early scene of *Fusion Cuisine* taken from a 1950s commercial, a male voice narrates over camera pans and wide shots of a large, open kitchen: "By the way things look as well as how they perform, our homes acquire new grace, new glamour, new accommodations, expressing not only the American love of beauty but also the basic freedom of the American people, which is the freedom of individual choice" (2000). A quick montage follows, juxtaposing colorful kitchen gadgets twirling, spinning, and juicing with images of Africans cooking over open fires and gas cookers and manually preparing foods. At times in *Fusion Cuisine*, the artist emphasizes juxtaposition by displaying the visible seams of her digital composites and making her cuts abrupt. In other scenes she transparently fuses these two narratives together through splicing, layering, and compositing, creating a new narrative that connects postwar fantasies to contemporary technological pursuits. Through digital manipulation in her artistic practice, Tuggar challenges the divide between the United States and Europe as technologically developed and Africa as rustic and folkloric. Her work displaces culturally embedded objects, like sophisticated domestic appliances, robotics, and mud huts, by splicing them into often humorous digital spheres marked by uneven distribution, unexpected appropriations, and asymmetrical consequences.

Born in Nigeria and now based in the United States, Tuggar is prominent among a generation of transnational media artists who are positioned as racialized and geographic others in global art markets. She has exhibited recently in solo shows in Geneva, New York, and Lisbon and has shown her work in major group exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), the New Museum of Contemporary Art, and international biennial exhibitions. Her art turns our attention to the process and labor involved in constructing visual knowledge about gendered subjectivity, belonging, and notions of progress. As *Fusion Cuisine* indicates, Tuggar's media art relies heavily on computer-based technologies and image-manipulation software like Adobe Photoshop and AfterEffects. Her process uses the medium to comment on the medium itself; thus, she employs technology as form and content to express and analyze its significance in the creation of current economic, cultural, and geographic systems.

In this essay I attempt to intervene in both feminist media and technology studies and cultural studies by focusing on media production by an African woman artist whose digital art challenges the primacy of the

West in technology discourses and gender studies. I consider how Tuggar's digital assemblage, meaning her appropriation and displacement of dominant visual narratives combined with her footage of contemporary Africa, challenges the classical system of spectatorial identification and offers a critique of dominant Western narratives of bourgeois domesticity and technological progress.[2] I argue that the artist employs the visible seam and image fusion both technically and interpretively to reveal the gaps, erasures, and ellipses of dominant visual narratives and their underlying ideology of spectatorship. To use Donna Haraway's terminology, Tuggar acts as a "modest witness" to how existing and emerging technoscapes reconstitute the meaning of gender, race, and subjectivity in representational practices of contemporary cultures and economies of globalization (1997).[3] Given Tuggar's status as a "modest witness," I also want to contextualize her work within contemporary African art and black diasporic visual culture and the precarious role of the transnational black artist within Western art markets. Primarily through her examination of identification and fantasy, Tuggar debunks narratives that both deny the presence of the black female spectator and that reduce the black, non-Western cultural producer to the folkloric or primitive with regard to technology.

To construct a theory of the visible seam in digital media production, I want to reconsider Kaja Silverman's psychoanalytic film theory of suture and her method of exposing the operations of the mastering gaze in dominant cinema. With this in mind, I consider how the employment of visible seams and Tuggar's method of fusion reveal the gaps in visual identification with the image and narrative that the system of suture attempts to seal. The visible seam offers a more appropriate framework for understanding the structural relationships that digital media requires through its viewership and interactivity. More important, the visible seam and the redress of normative visual narratives through a fusion of transhistorical and transgeographic imagery account for the decentered viewing positions of postcolonial, transnational communities, viewing positions occluded by the "unified" singular identification and seamless narrative structured through the editorial strategy of cinematic suture.

Psychoanalytic film theory has waned in the 1990s in part because of criticism by nonwhite feminist scholars and the rise of cultural studies and

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[2] I borrow the term *digital assemblage* from Jennifer González (2000).

[3] Haraway appropriates the term from Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer's *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (1985). She queers and makes corporeal the "objective" civil male "modest witness" of their text

postcolonial theory. Critics have argued that psychoanalytic film theory is based in bourgeois notions of the public and private sphere and that the scholarship leaves male dominance unchallenged.[4] While agreeing in part with these critiques, I find the concept of suture useful and relevant for theorizing rupture in digital media works by contemporary women artists engaged with displacing normative cinematic and technological narratives. Silverman's analysis of suture, outlined in her seminal study *The Subject of Semiotics* (1983), informs my reading of Tuggar's work, which provides a rich case study for reconsidering suture's application to fragmentary and interactive digital media arts. As my reading will suggest, Tuggar's work exposes both the seams and fusions of narrative and confuses spectator identification, inserting black female narrative subjects into discordant spaces and addressing and decentering habituated viewing positions.

Suture is a theory of cinematic identification that accounts for the relationship between ideology, signification, and subjectivity; it explains how classic narratives forge a relationship with the viewing subject through the masking of the process of production, most notably through a shot–reverse-shot editorial relation. Silverman writes that suture is "largely synonymous with the operations of classic narrative, operations which include a wide variety of editing, lighting, compositional and other formal elements, but within which the values of absence and lack always play a central role" (1983, 214). That is, she makes clear how the system of the suture allows for identification on behalf of the white male spectator: "One of the chief mechanisms by which the system of suture conceals the apparatuses of enunciation is by setting up a relay of glances between the male characters within the fiction and the male viewers in the theater audience, a relay which has the female body as its object. Similarly, one of the most effective strategies at its disposal for deflecting attention away from the passivity and lack of the viewing subject's own position is by displacing those values onto a female character within the fiction" (1983, 222). The process of suture grows more complex when we consider racial, linguistic, sexual, and national differences.[5]

As outlined by Silverman, suture, in its theoretical context and in its more rudimentary definition as the binding of a wound, provides tools for understanding digital assemblage in contemporary media art. In essence, much of contemporary digital art challenges not only the normative process

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    [4] See Gaines 1988; Juhasz 1995, 2001, hooks 1996; Abel, Christian, and Moglen 1997.
    [5] On the gaze, race, and identification in relation to black female spectatorship, see Gaines 1988; Bobo 1995, hooks 1996.

of identification but also the process of digital assemblage, which borrows on but is not the same as cinematic assemblage. For example, digital assemblage may simulate "cutting shots together," but it also uses a great deal more compositing of "shots" and their disparate elements to make meaning. Furthermore, because of the ease of compositing, it is also more likely to insert and juxtapose discarded refuse, remains, "found" materials, and disparate images that, despite their compositing, disrupt the cohesion of a normative cinematic "shot" or "scene." Thus, digital assemblage challenges the seamless "stitching up" of the "cuts" or "wound" that characterizes classic cinematic identification and narrative and normative visual culture. Indeed, much of Tuggar's work foregrounds and meditates on the normatively "invisible" wounds caused by narrative erasure of uneven development patterns and transnational flows of goods and peoples. Through a consideration of the visible seam and "impossible" fusion made possible by seaming, splicing, cutting, overlaying, and compositing in digital media practice, we see the possibilities that Tuggar's intervention in visual narratives of Western progress and technological development opens for considering racial, gendered, geographic, and linguistic differences that inform other viewing and speaking positions. In effect, the concepts of suture and gendered identification in feminist film scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s lay the groundwork for examining emergent, nonnarrative media productions in the twenty-first century, marked as an era of unprecedented technological globalization (Castells 2000).

Contemporary African art, digital aesthetics, and the colonial conquest

African art critic Sidney Littlefield Kasfir positions Tuggar as a part of a generation of transnational African artists, such as Yinka Shonibare, Tracey Rose, and Wangechi Mutu, who use commodity culture, mixed-media practices, and advertising aesthetics to comment on the effects of modernity in contemporary African societies (Kasfir 1999). These artists' works are often described as a bricolage of pre- and postcolonial African art practices, contemporary Western art training, and the influences of nomadic subject positions (Kasfir 1999; Oguibe 1999). Located outside of their nations of origin, many reside in European and American metropoles. Tuggar is exemplary of this type of cosmopolitan nomadism, the result of political, economic, and cultural systems that allow select intellectuals and cultural workers from underdeveloped regions access to certain urban centers in the United States and Western Europe. This geo-

political and economic movement must be distinguished, however, from the nomadism of political and economic refugees.[6] Trained partly in England and with a masters in fine arts degree in sculpture from Yale University, Tuggar resides in New York City. Her background in sculpture is reflected in the compositional structure of her work, her profound attunement to the social implications of space, and the ways in which she builds her multitiered video and photocollages, which combine elements from various regions and historical moments.

Tuggar's media art turns a critical eye to those discussions of race, gender, and digital technology that too often reduce complex issues to utopian notions of a futuristic technotopia or to dystopic notions of the "digital divide"—a generic phrase that refers to the unequal distribution of technology and the imbalance of technological literacies based on race, class, gender, and geographic factors.[7] Alondra Nelson, the editor of a special issue of *Social Text* on race and technology, writes that the digital divide "is frequently reduced to race alone and thus falls all too easily in stride with preconceived ideas of black technical handicaps and 'Western' technological superiority" (2002, 4). Those without access to computers and who do not know how to read their symbols are framed as inhabitants of a past era; they have no place in technological narratives of the future. Such framing of the crisis is steeped in a long tradition of understanding race and technology as incompatible terms while employing technologies to surveil and subjugate racialized groups.[8] Tuggar's media art challenges the representational codes and practices of the race-technology divide. Her artistic practice and art itself resist this paradigm by showing how such framing fails to address the relationship between technology and subjectivity in contemporary culture, a relationship explored by key feminist theorists in technology studies.[9] For example, feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti

[6] I am indebted to Dorinne Kondo's (1997) critique of "cosmopolitanism" as promoted by key male intellectuals. Kondo examines the masculinist elitism and class hierarchy that undergird the contemporary deployment of "cosmopolitanism" in cultural theory

[7] For critiques of much critical scholarship on the relationship of race, gender, and technology, see Nelson and Tu 2001 and Nelson 2002.

[8] Recent anthologies like *Race in Cyberspace* (Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman 2000) and *Technicolor* (Nelson and Tu 2001) have attempted to address these inadequacies in race-technology discourses. See also Muhammad 1999 on the work of contemporary black artists who use new technologies to enter discourses on race, access, and nation.

[9] Anna Everett debunks myths of what she calls "black technophobia" by looking at the innovative uses and appropriations of new technology by black communities (2002, 132) González (2000), looking at configurations of gendered and racialized identity in digital space, examines how these are often based on physiological tropes of racial and sexual differences and normative representational codes. See also Haraway 1997 and Braidotti 2002

argues that we have yet to consider seriously the implications of our overwhelming embrace of technology for our understanding of subjectivity, nation, and difference (2002).

Crucially, Tuggar's work draws a correlation between the pursuit of technotopia and the motives that led to the colonial conquest of centuries past. Her use of digital technology to examine the ramifications of technological-capitalistic systems of unequal distribution is similar to the work of other black diasporic artists who use new media in their artistic practice. Curator and scholar Erika Muhammad, examining black media artists and their work, writes that these cultural producers "not only use digital media to comment on digital culture, but they also employ digital tools to comment on the chronicling of history and to anticipate future realities" (1999, 299). In Tuggar's work, this commentary occurs on multiple levels. First, her art links geopolitical and technological pursuits to the desire to dominate and conquer. Second, her art highlights not only how technologies have been used by Western powers to subjugate and exploit peoples in other regions but also how the drive for more advanced technologies is based in unequal power and labor relations. Furthering this correlation, media scholar Everett argues that "the current scramble for domination and domestication of the Internet and the World Wide Web is not unlike that unleashed on the African continent by the West in the nineteenth century" (2002, 137).

Meditating on the notion of progress that sparked both colonial and technological expansionism in the West, Tuggar's media art explores how Atlantic "trade routes" between Africa, Europe, and the United States affect the distribution of technology in such disparate localities as African street markets and U.S. domestic settings (Kino 2001, 155). The artist makes visible in her work the seams and rupture caused by globalization, transnational consumption patterns, and the creation of technological fortresses. Her artwork, like that of many other African artists in similar positions, circulates intentionally as a transnational product in an increasingly globalized culture industry in which current imbalances are made more extreme. Because of the transnational stature of these contemporary African artists and the highly capitalistic nature of art markets, their work moves throughout international metropolitan cities such as New York, London, Hong Kong, and Berlin. Their audiences tend to be a mixture of educated Westerners and subjects from former colonies and non-Western regions who live in the urban centers of the developed world. In *Meditation on Vacation* (2002), commissioned by MOMA, Tuggar explicitly addresses her primarily white, educated audience as Western tourists.

Curated as part of the multimedia exhibition *Tempo* at MOMA in 2002,

the sculpture and video installation considers the overdetermined narrative, and its visual tropes, of Western tourists' journeys to underdeveloped locales in search of idyllic settings and peaceful natives. The sculptural and video piece recreates the experience of travel, including a section of an airplane replete with passenger seats for the installation's audience. The passengers-audience face a monitor, similar to those used to display safety procedures and in-flight entertainment.[10] On the monitor, a four-and-a-half-minute video of quick visual montages and multiple voice-over narration loops as audience members enter and exit. The video, like much of Tuggar's art, consists of appropriated images from other media, in this case visuals of the Caribbean as a travel destination as well as footage of local workers shot by the artist in Nigeria. The artist, at points, narrates: "This is a meditation on vacation" (*Meditation on Vacation* 2002).

Borrowing and slightly altering a passage from Jamaica Kincaid's nonfiction text *A Small Place* (1988), Tuggar records a woman's voice narrating over stock footage of vacationing whites, clips from Stephanie Black's documentary *Life and Debt* (2001), and ethnographic-style footage of African subjects and locales:

> Every native is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. Every native would like to find a way out. Every native would like a rest. Every native would like a tour, but some natives, most natives in the world, cannot go anywhere. They're too poor to escape the realities of their lives, and they're too poor to live properly in the place that they live, which is the very place that you, the tourist, want to go. So when the native sees the tourist, they envy you. They envy your own ability to leave your own banality and boredom. They envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself.[11]

[10] The installation is also reminiscent of cinematic trends in the 1950s to create a multisensory filmic experience, such as Cinerama, 3-D films, and Smell-O-Vision.

[11] The passage in Kincaid's text reads: "That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain. For every native of every place is a potential tourist, and every tourist is a native of somewhere. Every native everywhere lives a life of overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and desperation and depression, and every deed, good and bad, is an attempt to forget this. Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere. They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist, want to go—so when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you, they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for

Addressing the tourist, presumed to be white and Western, the video draws correlations between leisure activities (tourism), globalization, immigration laws, and transnationally circulating commodity objects. Tuggar's nonwhite spectators are framed as postcolonial subjects whose occupancy of Western metropolises recognizes the colonial past and ongoing economic and political imbalances. At the same time, Tuggar resists didacticism and the tendency to create a rigid divide between "victim" and "perpetrator" when discussing issues of global unevenness. As a transnational artist who has the privilege to occupy the West, she makes herself overtly complicit in these cultural and economic imbalances. Through her use of humor and the ways in which her artistic practice always reveals the hand of the producer, Tuggar posits herself as a participant in the West's fetishism of technology, conquest, and difference, yet she also recognizes the specificity of her position as a racialized and gendered subject from a region rendered as both authentic (i.e., folkloric) and barren (i.e., underdeveloped) in dominant Western narratives.

While an understanding of the status of African art and of the positioning of contemporary African artists both in a transnational art market and within the framework of cultural tourism offers insight into the reception and circulation of Tuggar's work, her art should also be contextualized within the contemporary movement of digital art and aesthetics. W. J. T. Mitchell refers to "digital bricolage" as an imaging process that challenges the truth or authenticity of the photographic image ([1992] 2001). As an artistic practice, assemblage brings together various media—often found or recycled objects—whose histories contribute to the work of art. In the case of Tuggar, her process of digital assemblage includes the appropriation of found objects, that is, archival footage and popular Hollywood clips from such films as *The Fifth Element* (1997).

As mentioned earlier, the recycled or archival footage that contributes to Tuggar's assemblage tends to come from cold-war American culture. Her transhistorical imagery outstrips notions of postmodern play and pastiche and instead forges critical approaches to addressing the historical

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yourself" (1988, 18–19). Tuggar's *Meditation on Vacation* (2002) is directly in conversation with Black's critically acclaimed documentary, *Life and Debt* (2001), which examines the exploitative policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Jamaica. The film is driven by didactic narration adapted from Kincaid and addresses its audience as "you," the tourist who comes to Jamaica unaware of its geopolitical conditions. Tuggar uses the same narration to put her video in dialogue with Black's film. Whereas Black's film is geared to representing "the victims" and "the perpetrators" of contemporary transnational capital flows, Tuggar's work considers the nuances, contradictions, and ephemera that result from these systems.

and contemporary conditions that produce technological and transnational fusions. For example, in two of her digital photomontages, *Robo Makes Dinner* (2000) and *The Lady and the Maid* (2000), Tuggar humorously debunks monolithic technological and colonial narratives. Both are multitiered panels of several images that have been layered and composited to create alternative narratives. In *The Lady and the Maid*, a 1950s white housewife performs domestic chores in a living room that combines elements of contemporary decor with midcentury kitsch collectibles and display shelves filled with antiques (plate 6, p. 1427). A black African woman in a patterned West African dress relaxes in an overstuffed chair eating from a dish in her lap. The subjects look in different directions: the white woman down at her chore, the African woman outside the frame of the camera. Here, the artist leaves ambivalent who is the lady and who is the maid. In *Robo Makes Dinner*, Tuggar sets Robo—a nonhuman subject created to fulfill all of life's necessities so that humans can enjoy a life of total leisure—in an African family compound with all of the accoutrements of American domestic culinary settings (plate 7, p. 1428). Robo, who appears in several of Tuggar's video and photocollages, has replaced the black female domestic. Robo's presence in this African village and the proximity of incommensurable objects make lucid the racialization and national interests of technological development in Western discourse. In both digital collages, we see how the resulting effects of colonialism and the growth in consumer technologies affect domestic space in the West.

Tuggar's art, in all of its seriousness and complexity, is recognized for its playfulness and humor, crucial elements in both *Robo Makes Dinner* (2000) and *The Lady and the Maid* (2000). Somber heaviness typically frames discussions of technological inequality and gender and racial subjugation. Tuggar instead uses humor as a strategy through which to point out the shortcomings and gaps in dominant narratives. She incorporates cold-war television commercials that read as kitsch, as endemic of "Americana" and willful, ignorant blissfulness about the nation's destined future. The tone and level of analysis often come from the sound bites that Tuggar excerpts from motion picture archives. For example, in *Fusion Cuisine* (2000) she includes a melodramatic conversation between a white mother and daughter as they stand next to a washing machine discussing how difficult the mother's life must have been before the advent of certain domestic gadgets. Tuggar intentionally manipulates existing footage to allow space for herself as an uninvited spectator and as a complicit cultural producer who participates in the obsession with and consumption of the latest technologies. Her playfulness and humor crucially distinguish her

intended audience from the audiences addressed by the archival imagery. While we laugh at the cold-war footage that now reads as kitsch, while we assume that we know more than the intended audience of the commercials knew about modernization and global economics, the artist encourages us to face our own complicity in the latter's systemic practices. Through her humorous manipulations and dislocations, we, as her contemporary audience, may laugh at the technological dreams of the postwar generation, but, in pushing us to do so, Tuggar's work suggests that the joke is also on us.

Materiality, the digital cut, and feminist media practices

Fatimah Tuggar's work can be read within a tradition of feminist media art that questions the gendering of domestic space and deconstructs the public and private spheres as distinctly separate, bounded sites. For example, Tuggar's videos often posit the domestic interior of American households next to the open fair, street markets, and outdoor cooking areas of contemporary Nigeria where African women labor. Earlier feminist video works like Martha Rosler's *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), Sherry Milner's *Scenes from the Micro-War* (1985), and Vanalyne Green's *Trick or Drink* (1985) interrogated the gendered expectations placed on suburban women as housewives and debunked the myth of the ideal nuclear American family as the foundation of the nation's progress (Gever 1990). Furthermore, in the 1970s and 1980s, many feminist video artworks combined a critique of domestic subjugation with personal narratives. Centers like the Kitchen were crucial not only to the development of media art but also to women artists who were often excluded from male avant-garde art scenes because of their different interests and formal practices. Video art, in general, led to a movement of self-conscious artistic practice in which artists used the medium of video for an often intimate exploration of the self, most intimately their own corporeality. In addition to the focus on the female body, many of these artists challenged the denigration of the personal in "high art"—a critique strategically launched by male critics in response to female artists—by focusing on autobiographical subject matter.

Although Tuggar's media art shares the focus on technologies of gendered identity and the family as a consumption unit, her work also differs in many arenas from this tradition. While furthering feminist media art's deconstruction of the private-public divide, Tuggar resists autobiographical narratives in her artistic practice. Additionally, Tuggar's art elaborates on the distinctions between gendered space in Africa and the West, spe-

cifically the United States. Many of her images place white American women in the public spaces of African villages while locating African women laboring in American suburban homes. Tuggar's spatial dislocations demarcate differences in the public sphere regionally and in the various ways that gender norms are enforced. Specifically, black women for economic reasons have had to operate as menial laborers in the public sphere and in the domestic settings of white families, while simultaneously remaining invisible as subjects in these spaces. At the same time, white middle- and upper-class women have been bound to the home, which has functioned as a site of domestic duty and as a safe haven from the dangers of public space. Tuggar's investigation into gender, domesticity, and nation draws a correlation between American domestic space and the management of difference embodied in the foreigner. As Amy Kaplan suggests of nineteenth-century domestic literature, the domestic sphere necessitates not only gender division but also racial and national distinctions. She argues that the domestic presupposes its opposite—the foreign—and that domesticity relies on images of the foreign to sustain its discourse (1998). More significantly, Kaplan theorizes that domesticity mirrors U.S. imperialism: "Both follow a double compulsion to conquer and domesticate the foreign, thus incorporating and controlling a threatening foreignness within the borders of the home and the nation" (1998, 291). Tuggar's intervention into domestic narratives and her dislocations of white American and black African women demonstrate not only the expansionist ideologies underpinning American domesticity but also the way in which the "domestic" and the "foreign" function as cultural tropes.

Fusion Cuisine most successfully reveals the disruptive potential of Tuggar's practice in light of the public-private sphere divide, gendered domesticity, and nationalism. The domestication and gendering of certain technologies preoccupy this piece. To create the video, heavily based on cold-war commercials and advertisements that took the form of short films, Tuggar researched advertisements that touted a "new era" in domestic chores for white middle-class women. Technology was promoted as the private domain of the housewife and as having the potential to liberate her from the domestic sphere by transforming her life into one of limitless leisure. This growth in domestic technologies accompanied the expansion of the U.S. economy after World War II, the demographic shift toward suburbanization, and the architectural trend of making the kitchen the center of the house. Karal Ann Marling analyzes the gender implications of 1950s domestic technology and also argues that these gadgets became symbols of American advancement and superiority over the Soviet Union in the cold-war competition between the two countries

([1994] 2000). In fact, the postwar kitchen became a critical emblem of American democracy during this period. In recounting a famous disagreement over consumerism between Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon known as the "Kitchen Debate," Marling summarizes that, for Nixon, "the latest in kitchen consumerism stood for the basic tenets of the American way of life" ([1994] 2000, 243).

Another important feature of this era was the targeting of women as both consumer subjects and viewing subjects. Whereas classic narrative cinema appeals to male identification, much of cold-war television was geared specifically to cultivating a female viewing audience.[12] Advertisers targeted women by promoting "choice" and "empowerment" through consumerism. Marling, for example, discusses how kitchen gadgets were equated with masculinity and power. Yet the promotion of these technologies fed into gendered notions of women's instability and reinscribed women in traditional roles. Focusing on the rise in the late 1950s and 1960s of cultural critics and psychologists warning about the decadence of consumer culture and the homogeneity of suburban life, Marling writes, "'The Pushbutton Way to Leisure' promulgated by *Better Homes and Gardens* in the mid-1950s sometimes led straight to the psychiatrist's couch" ([1994] 2000, 266). Though commercials of domestic gadgetry presented themselves as offering women a new sense of power in the form of leisure and choice, women's consumption of these goods reinforced their subjugation and inferiority through discourses like "pushbutton" malaise.

Tuggar picks apart these related narratives of technology as national progress and consumption as emancipation in her video *Fusion Cuisine* by using the raw materials of the postwar fantasy in unintended ways. In one scene of the video, a husband who appears dressed as both a groom and a magician carries his young new bride into a futuristic kitchen (plate 8, p. 1428). In this clip from a 1950s commercial, the newlyweds enter the space in a dance routine reminiscent of those of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. Tuggar removes the commercial from its original context— postwar efforts to promote domestic technologies to suburban housewives—and creates a transhistoric, transnational dialogue on racialized and gendered domesticity and technological consumption. Just as the husband releases his dance partner, he disappears. Accompanying the visual narrative is a jingly sound track with a female singing, "Just like a man, you

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[12] For discussion of the female viewing audience and the television in domestic space, see Spigel 1992.

give him a break and you wind up in the kitchen, baking a cake" (*Fusion Cuisine* 2000). The abandoned bride, in a long white gown and an apron, is briefly at a loss and then realizes that she is in a utopian kitchen of the future—a large, shiny space with metal, glass, and plastic surfaces—where all domestic chores can be completed with the press of a button. Upon this realization, she dances around the kitchen in jubilation and sings, "Tick, tock, tick, tock. I'm free to have fun around the clock" (*Fusion Cuisine* 2000). The bride then performs a series of costume changes reflecting her life of leisure made possible by the Frigidaire kitchen. Cut into this humorous narrative are contemporary visuals of African women completing "domestic chores," and, at points, they appear to dance along with the bride. After her day of pleasure, the bride removes a cake replete with icing and candles from a futuristically styled oven. She then blows out the lit candles, ending the fantasy of a domestic technotopia. The digital insertions of African female bodies reveal the seams of this fantasy and foreground it as a product of specific political, racial, and geographic systems.

In this scene from *Fusion Cuisine*, Tuggar exploits the narrative and temporal implications of the cut to allude to an alternative discourse, distinct from the one presented in the original commercial. In film studies the cut has long been understood as a mechanism for manipulating temporal and spatial constraints. For example, through the cut, a subject can instantaneously be moved from one geographic-temporal location to another. Silverman also analyzes the significance of the cut: "Cinematic coherence and plenitude emerge through multiple cuts and negations. Each image is defined through its differences from those that surround it syntagmatically and those it paradigmatically implies ('this but not that'), as well as through its denial of any discourse but its own. Each positive cinematic assertion represents an imaginary conversion of a whole series of negative ones. This castrating coherence, this definition of a discursive position for the viewing subject which necessitates not only its loss of being but the repudiation of alternative discourses, is one of the chief aims of the system of suture" (1983, 205). The overlays of dancing black women that are cut and composited into individual frames of this classically coherent scene of plenitude operate differently than cuts between frames. They disrupt and complicate the fantasy of technology as social progress, gender emancipation, and patriotic duty. Their ghostly presence brings to mind Toni Morrison's analysis of the absent presence of the black or "Africanist" subject in the canon of American literary tradition (1993, 33). Analyzing the specter of black subjects in American literature, Morrison argues that, in fact, this dark presence shaped the narrative trajectory

of the American national canon. She argues that the formation of the nation and the narrative of "the American Dream" were connected to the fears and longing projected on the specter of blackness. This dark but ghostly figuration has persisted in and through other cultural formations, especially the moving image—and thus the absent presence-potential of the dark other is very much a part of the discourse of the digital revolution and notions of technological progress.

Fusion Cuisine continues to rupture existing narratives and to fuse them into new ones about representation, consumption, materiality, and technological development. For example, in the final scene from *Fusion Cuisine*, Tuggar uses a 1950s industrial film about the billboard as advertising device as the canvas for her digital manipulation and narrative building. An authoritative male voice-over discusses the science of advertising and the necessity of consumption to American culture: "Potential consumers are also reached by this all-inclusive medium. . . . Each location is selected on the basis of known rules of traffic. The number of persons who move past each panel over a given time is an accurate scientifically established figure. So accurate is this figure it forms an immutable law: where you find the poster panel, there you'll find the traffic moving to market. Strategic locations ensure repetition, and repetition creates consumer remembrance driving home a message not once, not twice but many times, thus bridging the gap between the manufacturer and the consumer" (*Fusion Cuisine* 2000). A series of images illustrates and at times subverts the narrator's point about the science of generating consumer desire. Tuggar uses the images from the original film that illustrates the narration: scenes of busy thoroughfares lined with billboards, large poster panels outside of shopping markets, and posted advertisements near public transportation. We see consumers scurrying into stores and traffic driving along business districts. The posters advertise an array of domestic consumer goods, like packaged food products. Yet, in some of the billboards, Tuggar has removed the original commodities and replaced them with a variety of images of African subjects and settings. In one panel, she inserts her photomontage *Suburbia* (1998), a reflection on development and consumption with identical large modern homes in the background and African bodies surrounded by an assortment of technological and consumer goods on the driveways to the homes. Similarly, another billboard has been spliced so that we see Tuggar's photocollage *Working Woman*, an image of a smiling African woman surrounded by a computer and other technological goods. Most significantly, in a series of frames that uses both *Working Woman* and the archival footage, Tuggar digitally puts the audience of the original commercial in conversation with her targeted audience. The archival footage

shows workers pasting a new advertisement onto a billboard. The section of the panel yet to be covered contains an African woman who both looks trapped in a moment and peers outside of the frame.

Tuggar's digital art also challenges notions of materiality and experience that have traditionally framed discussions of women's arts as well as non-Western arts. The growth in digital technology, and specifically digital image production, has generated complex questions about the materiality of objects and experience in a highly mediatized culture. Obviously, digitization allows for producers to alter original texts more easily by removing or adding elements to them—the basis of Tuggar's practice of digital bricolage. Tuggar is aware of the complex relationship between materiality and digitality, particularly given that her work is often based on historical materials that exist independently of her appropriation and manipulation of them. She considers her process in an early artist statement:

> I have chosen computer graphics as a tool for these images because the language of advertisement as a medium affords a sense of "casualness." My hope is that by adopting this language, art too can share the mass popularity of the media. Furthermore, my choice of the computer as a means of production allows me to extend the metaphors of "possession," "material," and "property" which are all inherent within the work. The use of the computer raises the question of the physical existence of the work itself. Where is the "real" work located? There is the image you see on the screen. The jet ink print mounted on a museum gallery wall. There is the binary information stored on a disc. In its basic physicality it is impossible to locate where the work is, though it is certainly available to human experience, in a virtual space. (Tuggar 2000)

In this statement, Tuggar implicitly acknowledges the physical bodies of her audience. She locates them as corporeal subjects in specific space and time while articulating the various perceptual fields in which her work can be experienced (i.e., as physical object on a wall, as data stored on disc, and as pixels on a computer screen). In fact, the spectatorship of her work is premised on the multiple presences of her art: digitally (as bytes stored on computer and DVD), analogically (as televisual images through VHS playback tape), and physically (as object on gallery wall). Examining the relationship between perception, the lived body, and visual technology, Vivian Sobchack expands on the "decentering" features of digital media that Tuggar's statement describes. She writes: "Digital electronic technology atomizes and abstractly schematizes the analogical quality of the

photographic and cinematic into discrete pixels and bits of information that are then transmitted *serially*, each bit discontinuous, discontiguous, and absolute—each bit being-in-itself even as it is part of a system" (2000b, 149). Digitization has not only radically altered the ways in which images are captured, processed, and manipulated; these innovations have also, as Sobchack suggests, changed how information comes into being and altered the relationship between parts of data to the whole (2000a). Essentially, digital technology allows Tuggar to take specific material—bits of discontinuous data—from archival film stock, for example, and seamlessly—yet visibly—stitch them into alternative narrative systems.

Moreover, as demonstrated in *Fusion Cuisine*, digitization presents a challenge to the classical concept of suture as a relationship between individual cinematic shots. Digital media can present a structural relationship *in* an individual shot or image. In the shot–reverse-shot of cinematic narrative, the narrative and spectator's viewing positions are stitched together—while the authoring subject and cinematic apparatus remain hidden. Tendencies in media art, since its inception in the late 1960s, have included the explicit alienation of audience through various mechanisms: the creation of installations of which visual media are just one component, the combination of visual media with live performance, and the merging of the fictional subject and authoring subject as in the works of Cindy Sherman, Vito Acconci, and Adrian Piper. In media art based in digital bricolage, the two shots that structure the suturing process may occur in a single individual image. For example, in *The Lady and the Maid* (2000) and the fantasy dance scene in *Fusion Cuisine* (2000), a compositing and fusion of discontiguous data replace the system of suture. In these works, the spectator's gaze meets the gazes of the authoring subject through the discontiguous gazes of the subjects *in* the archival footage as well as the implied gaze of the viewing subject *of* this original footage. Tuggar's technical and interpretive process rips open the "seamless" seams of the original material so that her audience can see the multiple positions invested in bricolage material. Through digital assemblage the odd and complex relay of glances constructed in one shot intrinsically acknowledges multiple viewing positions denied by the normative identification promoted in dominant cinematic narratives.

"Forsaken geographies": Non-Western artists and the Western art world

Reviews of Tuggar's art often focus on the prominence of juxtaposition in her work as opposed to the compositing and fusion present in the pieces

discussed thus far. When critics invoke the language of opposition to discuss her art, this juxtaposition most often gets framed in terms that posit Western technological objects *against* African subjects and traditional instruments (Tranberg 2001; Bennett 2002; Milani 2002). While Tuggar's work can certainly be read this way, such descriptions overlook the nuances and visible seams that in fact challenge notions of opposition between these two regions and instead emphasize the mutually dependent relationship between these regions and respective tropes. When the complex representational alignments occurring in her work are addressed, they often are reduced to "angry," "didactic," or difficult to comprehend, which furthers the binarism that the artist attempts to resist. Here, the concept of fusion offers insight into the type of cultural, geographic, and representational intersections that Tuggar aims to construct. This goal is reflected in her practice and in the deliberateness of the visible seam in her video and photographic work. Art critic Elizabeth Janus, aware of what is symbolically and discursively at stake in Tuggar's representations, describes the intentionality of the cut and composite in *Fusion Cuisine*: "Tuggar seems to use computer imaging not so much to mask the flaws in the pictures she chooses or hide her process (the cuts and pastes remain intentionally visible) but rather to underscore the fact that one's understanding of another culture usually relies on a tightly constructed (and often ideologically tinged) version of the truth. She makes the case that technology, both high and low, in industrial and developing countries, is a tool used for basic survival and development but also to control, influence, distort, and reinforce the status quo" (2001, 147). Thus, her work and use of digital imaging software emphasize the constructed nature of representation and the role of technology in representational production.

In one of Tuggar's most recent pieces, *Changing Space* (2002), an interactive Internet project produced by the Art Production Fund, Tuggar allows the audience to participate in the creation of transnational technospheres.[15] We are allowed to choose from various backgrounds, including a tropical beach with palm trees, an ornate colonial foyer with marble statues, an African dirt road with mud huts, and a modern Western living room. As audience-producers, we are then able to place various subjects and objects onto this background. Movement and sound accompany many of these content choices; for example, one could choose a speeding New York Police Department squad car with sirens wailing or

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[15] The Internet-based project is located at http://www.artproductionfund.org/inspace/tuggar/cs.html.

a small black child who bounces a ball that resembles the earth. This online art project, while making explicit the process of constructing representation, also demonstrates the asymmetry of global flows and technological consumption. Though we as audience cannot add elements to the choices offered in this interactive project, we are allowed to partially author the outcome.

Through the interactivity of works like *Changing Space* and the disruptive narrative offered by the visible seams in video and photographic collages, Tuggar's work assumes decentered viewing positions and active audiences who do not necessarily share geographic, racial, gender, or temporal sameness. While Tuggar's art circulates among Western art critics and cosmopolitan, transnational communities in urban centers, it also addresses spectators who are familiar with the cultural, political, and economic politics of "othering" and those who have the privilege of residing in Western cultural centers but who come from "forsaken geographies," to use artist and critic Olu Oguibe's (1996) phrase referring to regions of the world that stay off the radar of technological-capitalistic systems. Oguibe concerns himself with how these geographies, "the localities of the 'Other,'" remain outside of the discourse on the digital revolution, and with how dire needs of nutrition, safety, education, and health care render technophilic discourse irrelevant in these locales (1996). Expanding on his analysis, I would argue that these forsaken geographies also suffer from normative representational codes that frame them as timeless, faraway, and *forsaken* places where technology is useless, inaccessible, or at odds with the way of life. Disparity in resources and access that subjugate certain regions to a state of "permanent" impoverishment are critical, but we need to also recognize the violence of Western discourse and technological apparatuses in rendering these regions as invisible and technologically forsaken.

Tuggar's use of the visible seam acknowledges the imbalances of power between different viewing positions. The others from forsaken geographies are stitched into narratives not to cover the fissure or gap between these positions but instead to highlight it. The visible seam and the fusion of multiple narratives in Tuggar's work do not promote a multiculturalist discourse that ignores historical and present injustices. Instead, that work asks the spectator to consider the unintended and intended consequences of operating power systems. In her three-minute video, *Conveyance* (2001), curated as part of *Africaine*, an exhibition of contemporary African women artists at the Studio Museum in Harlem, the artist contemplates industrialization and the disparity between its utopian ideal and its

material consequences in both overdeveloped regions and forsaken geographies.[14] The video examines specifically how the factory line and the automobile have changed infrastructural systems around the globe. Thus, the title of the work takes on multilayered significance as the artist considers the cultural, geographic, and symbolic impact of the industrial revolution and its shaping of transportation and human movement across the planet. Again, her signature style of pairing contemporary African imagery with Western popular cultural icons and archival footage from American commercials and industrial films is at play.

For example, a long black-and-white clip of a factory line in which the audience sees an automobile being built is followed by the artist's recent footage of a busy intersection in an African city where motor vehicles spew out visible exhaustion fumes. In one humorous scene, the artist borrows footage from the blockbuster Hollywood science fiction film *The Fifth Element* (1997) to construct a postnational, transhistorical narrative about the precarious roles of subjects of forsaken geographies—specifically African women—in political economic systems. A futuristic police vehicle that floats through air, excerpted from *The Fifth Element*, encounters a startled, elderly African woman videotaped by Tuggar. The artist creates a complex relay between the two sets of images. The officers in the vehicle attempt to identify her through sophisticated security technology. They zoom in on her features and scan her but cannot locate her in their system. One officer declares, "She has no file." The unsuspecting and startled gaze of the African woman meets the officers, who are portrayed in the narrative of *The Fifth Element* as robotic, dehumanized enforcers of an ever-present state surveillance system. In shot one, we briefly see the woman as she appears trapped in the frame of the camera. We then see the officers in their futuristic, floating vehicle excerpted from the Hollywood narrative. In the next shot, we see the woman, whom they cannot recognize, staring out of the frame beyond the viewing subject's reach. The exchange between the state and the woman continues; the state looks at her as she looks beyond the officers and adjusts her headdress. The officers then use technology to grid and scan her body into their system. This is to no avail. They cannot recognize her, for recognition would be an acknowledgement of her subjectivity. She is alien and cannot be detected by this technologically sophisticated future state for she does not belong in this future narrative.

This scene relies on the significance of the shot–reverse-shot in suturing narrative gazes and spectatorial identification. In revealing the artifice of

[14] *Africaine* was held from January 24, 2002, to March 31, 2002

visual technology and the specificity of viewing and speaking positions, *Conveyance* ultimately alters this shot construction by offering a series of shots that represents a breakdown in the seamless relations constituted between the fictional subjects and the spectator. Silverman examines how the shot–reverse-shot is a common device for suturing cinematic narratives; it allows the camera to deny its existence by inviting the audience to believe that the look is always that of a fictional character as opposed to that of the cinematic apparatus or director (1983, 201–2). Silverman writes that the shot–reverse-shot "derives from the imperative that the camera deny its own existence as much as possible, fostering the illusion that what is shown has an autonomous existence, independent of any technological interference, or any coercive gaze" (1983, 201–2). Tuggar interrupts this strategy by offering a series of shots that not only highlights her technological manipulation of the visual material but also reveals two different narrative worlds that contain different authoring subjects, fictional subjects, and viewing subjects while simultaneously putting these worlds in conversation through her process of compositing and visible fusion. Most significantly, the African woman's refusal to return the gaze frustrates not only the shot–reverse-shot formation but also the coercive power of the mastering gaze, here represented as the state. Instead, she looks beyond the fictional subject and the spectator's reach and identifies a world outside of the visual field. Her gaze alludes to another narrative beyond the narrative worlds conveyed in both sets of imagery. Not only does her presence as a black female subject in this technological world make her unreadable, but also her extrafilmic look cannot be understood within the system of the suture and normative identification.

Conveyance ends with an American woman singing a commercial jingle from a postwar commercial to an audience of whites who clap along to her voice: "Everyone says the future is strange, but I have a feeling some things won't change" (2001). This strangely chirpy and foreboding song seems to reinforce the normative codes that govern fantasies and visions of the future. Much of Tuggar's work presents her audience with fantastical imagery of the possibilities of technology to underscore the singer's words that "some things"—power relations, gendered domesticity, and racialized and geographic disparities—will not change. Tuggar's choice to end on this note, taken from postwar commercial footage that is eerily resonant today, disavows utopian visions of a more egalitarian future as a result of technological innovation.

Tuggar's positioning as a subject of a forsaken geography who is trained at elite institutions and who practices internationally contributes to her critical acclaim and reception in European and American art circles. Her

compositionally rich photocollages and digital video pieces are well received in part because of her constant toying with not only the tools of technology but also the fantasy and discourse of technological progress. In no way do I want to diminish the aesthetic and political significance of her work; however, I do want to suggest that, for some critics and curators, Tuggar appears anomalous in her mastery of technology, her detailed interest in medium and composition, and her spectatorial position inside the United States. As a way of explaining her positioning and art within familiar and racialized terms, some critics frame her work within overdetermined conventions of autobiographical narrative or indigenous concerns. Oguibe (1996), as well as other cultural critics, has discussed the tendency of white Western critics to reduce cultural productions from nonwhites to the autobiographical, partly as a method of containment and dismissal. Art historian Kellie Jones (2002), for example, writes about the struggle of photographer Lorna Simpson to resist such tropes of female and black artistic practices. Jones examines the sociological narratives that are employed to marginalize the aesthetic merits of Simpson as well as of other minority artists. Artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1996) comments on the construction and reception of artists from forsaken geographies in international art circles and the mythology of the folk artist versus the high artist that frames their entry into these markets. Specifically describing the experience of Latino cultural producers working in the United States, he writes:

> Caught between a preindustrial past and an imposed postmodernity, we continue to be manual beings—*homo fabers* par excellence, imaginative artisans (not technicians)—and our understanding of the world is strictly political, poetical, or metaphysical at best, but certainly not scientific. . . . [W]hen we decide to step out of our realm and utilize high technology in our art (most of the time we are not even interested), we are meant to naively repeat what others have already done. We often feed this mythology by overstating our romantic nature and humanistic stances and/or by assuming the role of the colonial victims of technology. (1996, 176)

I read Tuggar's practice as resisting such mythmaking, particularly in how she addresses her audience and deals with the cultural complexities of technological consumption and transnational cultural and economic flows. Oguibe explains how contemporary African artists in such precarious transnational positioning must play it safe, always aware of how easy it is to be erased in the global marketplace of contemporary art and visual culture

(1999, 16). Oguibe criticizes the Western critic and scholar's desire to reduce the cultural production of contemporary transnational African artists to overdetermined narratives of African folk culture, crafts, traditions, and mythologies.[15] These reductive paradigms persist despite works like Tuggar's that challenge the codes and symbols on which they are based.

What Fatimah Tuggar's media art, as well as recent scholarship on race and technology, demonstrates is the necessity for more critical analyses of the intersections among technology, globalization, and gendered and racialized subjectivity. As I have suggested throughout this study, returning to the theory of suture and expanding its reach to account for the visible seam offer insight into the media production currently changing the playing field of who enunciates as speaking—producing—subjects. Tuggar's work demonstrates the potential of the visible seam, which highlights the contradictions, unintended consequences, and erasures in dominant cultural narratives. Quite literally, the artist digitally stitches African female bodies into Western fantasies of technotopias based in facile notions of gendered emancipation and nationalistic dominance. Tuggar's digital media also demonstrates the necessity for feminist film and media theory to continue to expand its lens beyond classic Hollywood and televisual narratives to consider how small-scale productions are addressing gendered representation in a transnational context. Her work successfully reveals that the global and the local are in no way opposing forces and are in fact reflected in each other.

Tuggar's rupture of technological, cinematic, and art historical narratives is at once symbolic and literal, as she physically and conceptually manipulates preexisting images to reconstitute alternative meanings about race, gender, and technology. Her work also considers the history of dominant representational codes that function by framing the racialized, gendered, and geographic other through folkloric paradigms. Tuggar's digital video pieces and photomontages allude to the crisis of representing transnational subjectivities in an increasingly globalized and technologized world where new tools are used to maintain old imbalances and certain geographies remain marginal to these emerging developments and narratives. Yet, as her work and her subject position demonstrate, intervention

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[15] Oguibe (1999) discusses an encounter between postmodern critic Thomas McEvilley and African artist Ouattara, who now lives in New York. According to Oguibe, when McEvilley interviewed Ouattara he asked questions that fit into a predetermined narrative about what an African artist is: questions about his "native" land and his family. Oguibe argues that Ouattara could only resist these questions through silence, aware of the power imbalance in the exchange.

through production and uninvited spectatorship—that is, taking up digital, material, and discursive space as a modest witness—can disrupt the binary discourse that necessitates a subject who is timeless, ahistorical, and forsaken to maintain the technological fantasies on which the United States and other overdeveloped nations' concepts of citizenship, progress, and democracy are built.

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Pat Aufderheide

Debra Zimmerman

From A to Z: A Conversation on Women's Filmmaking

Media critic Pat Aufderheide and film distributor Debra Zimmerman have known each other for almost two decades through the world of independent filmmaking. Since 1983, Zimmerman has been executive director of Women Make Movies (WMM), the foremost distributor of women's films made in the United States and abroad to theaters, television, schools, and community organizations.[1] Aufderheide, a noted critic and scholar, focuses on independent media and media policy.

In this conversation, held at the International Documentary Film festival Amsterdam (IDFA) in November 2002, Zimmerman and Aufderheide talk about the cultural production and circulation of women's films and the relationships among women's movements, women's filmmaking and aesthetics, and viewing publics.

Pat Aufderheide (PA): How did you get involved in women's films?

Debra Zimmerman (DZ): Well, I am not sure, but I do remember the day I decided to become involved with Women Make Movies. Alice Fix, my women's studies professor at the State University College in New Paltz, New York, encouraged me to go to a Women's Weekend in 1977. Ariel Dougherty, the founder of WMM in 1972, and Carol Clement, an early WMM member, were screening a film called *Musreel* (1975) in a barn. I remember sitting at the screening, surrounded by women, and thinking that I had never had this experience before—I had never seen my experiences reflected back to me on film. It was so powerful that I stopped then and said, "This is what I want to do. I want to feel this way all the time." I don't think that anyone can overestimate how important it is to have that experience. Even now, when I attend screenings of our

films, I still hear people saying the same thing, audiences talking about the power of realistic portrayals of women.

When I went to work at WMM in the late seventies, first as an intern and then as the associate producer of a video called *Why Women Stay* (1980), the feminist film movement was very concerned with positive images. It was a way to rebel, a way to offer an alternative to the images of women being projected in the mainstream media. It was about changing the way people see women. Later on, we realized that it was much more complex than just showing positive images. It was important to look at all aspects of women's lives, both the positive and the negative, because that is where the complexity lies. And I think it is the complexity that we've gotten to in terms of exploring different kinds of feminisms.

PA: How has the organization of WMM reflected different issues in the women's movement over time?

DZ: I don't think the objectives have changed all that much, but we certainly have changed as an organization. We started in the second wave of the women's movement, when it was all about the stories that weren't being told. Women Make Movies's very first film—this was a number of years before I came to the organization—was *Healthcaring from Our End of the Speculum* (1976), which to me was the film version of the book *Our Bodies, Our Selves* (Boston Women's Health Book Collective 1971). Ariel Dougherty and Sheila Page, the founders of WMM, had a very specific vision: they wanted to both train women to make films as well as make films that dealt with women's stories. They realized that women needed to have access to a camera to be able to tell those stories.

PA: Didn't they also need to develop the sense that women had the right to tell those stories, and to tell them in public? We grew up knowing that we could only tell those stories once we already had our battle scars, and then only to other women. And that our silence was grounded in the notion that we couldn't, or maybe shouldn't, control some aspects of our lives. So I don't think WMM can have been just about the acquisition of technical skills.

In college I discovered that there had been earlier feminist movements. All these women had gone to work in World War II—which I also learned about later in movies like *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* (1980)— and then been told to go home and shut up. I learned about Margaret Mead, and I thought, how did Margaret Mead get so far? At the University of Minnesota I got to know Sara Evans, the brilliant historian, and learned that women had been critical to the mobilization of the early civil rights movement. I thought women's history seems to be this history of breaking

through cover-ups. And so I saw that as well in the early feminist movies that you are referring to.

DZ: Do you think of yourself as a feminist critic?

PA: Feminism for me is one example of a movement that gives people the conviction that they have the right to participate, and for me communications is the key to that. That's why I'm so interested in independent film. It's a cultural production approach—how do people come to the point where they articulate something? What resources do they draw on? What language? What sets of expectations? What happens when they intervene in a communications flow? Ultimately I care about how communications and power intersect, and how people who don't have social power come to exercise any.

DZ: I wrote down what you told me yesterday, when we were talking at the [International Documentary] festival: "Unless you have some access to power, you're not in the game, you are merely right."

PA: It's a political philosophy—a pragmatic approach to making change with media. I think that is what you're about—I see you as making pathways for women with a feminist perspective to reach audiences that can use this information to change their lives and others' lives. You're a talented businessperson, and you're not a romantic about what products work in the marketplace, but you support feminist goals in the process.

DZ: I would say that the organizing principle is that WMM is devoted exclusively to films that are by and about women, which to this day continues to irk, confuse, confound, puzzle, and make men mad. They don't understand it. Everybody says, "Why isn't there a Men Make Movies?" And I say, "But there is a Men Make Movies . . . it's called Hollywood!" Why shouldn't women have one teeny tiny part of this film industry? They have so little. Women still represent only 10 percent of the Directors Guild of America. And that includes women directors, first and second assistant directors, stage mangers as well as other positions like unit production manager. So we devote ourselves to the mission that women come first. We are saying that women's issues are paramount and important and in need of one organization to focus on them.

I am definitely not a feminist essentialist. I am not somebody who believes that if women ruled the world, the world would be great, because women are so much better than men. But I do think women's films are different from men's films. As a joke, we once said there has to be water in every woman's film. We realized this when we spent two days watching acquisitions tapes. But more seriously, because of socialization and experiences, women see the world in a completely different way than men.

And their films reflect that. Even in the most simplistic terms, women see themselves as central in their own lives, and in their films they are the ones in control of the gaze.

PA: How did the organization move from a production organization to a distributor?

DZ: For the first five years, very significant money came from the National Endowment for the Arts and from the New York Council of the Arts. Then, after the Carter administration ended and Reagan was elected in 1980, WMM just about fell apart. We lost all of our funding.

PA: So a viable business strategy comes as a result of a political crisis, and it is a political solution.

DZ: Yes, it was a decision that took a great deal of discussion. There was a real split on the board. Some people felt that we should maintain our community-based roots, providing technical training to women who wanted to make films and providing direct connection to the community by showing films within the community—in Chelsea, in Brooklyn and Queens, and in small communities. Some of the board had a difficult time understanding how distribution would accomplish our mission. But the bottom line was that when we lost all of our funding and were barely functioning, groups around the country were still asking to rent and buy the films we distributed. And it also was the only program we ran that brought income into the organization.

PA: It's so interesting that that's where the need was. Another reason I care about independent film is that a film plays a unique role for a local organization. When you show a movie, you offer people something that has been created with larger resources than you would have alone. It has some cachet, it comes with a little stamp of approval. You can have an event around it, and people have the safety and comfort of having a little screen between them and reality. They can like it or dislike it, and they can talk about it. And they will, because anybody feels free to have an opinion about a movie.

All of those films came out of a process, and then in their product form, they become part of another process. And Women Make Movies is now a guarantee. People feel that they know that if it comes from there, it is within the bounds of something they think is important.

DZ: I think we have worked very hard to create that "guarantee," and I appreciate your recognizing it. But it's also important to recognize that we weren't the first to distribute women's film. In fact, in New York, at the same time that WMM was founded as a collective to train women to make films, New Day Films started as a distribution collective. And in California there were two other distributors. Frances Reid (most recently

codirector of *Long Night's Journey into Day* [2000], an award-winning documentary about South African Peace and Reconciliation Commissions) was one of the founders of Iris Films. And Freude Bartlett ran Serious Business, which had a very important feminist component. When these organizations went under in the 1980s shortly after the advent of video (which, believe it or not, most of us then believed would jeopardize distribution of independent film because of its ability to be duplicated), both assisted WMM to grow by giving us films, mailing lists, and other resources. It was as if we were being passed the baton to continue being part of the cultural arm of feminism.

And as you said, we've gone on a journey to where now, to use the most commercial possible word, WMM has become a brand. People seek out a certain type of work that they think they can find in our catalog. That again has everything to do with the way the collection has grown and changed, and the way that it reflects the kinds of feminist media work that women have been doing for the last twenty years.

One of the first projects I worked on when I came back to the organization in 1983 was Punto de Vista Latina, which was the first collection of films by Latin American women to be available in the United States. It actually started out as a collection of films by Latinas, with *After the Earthquake* (1979), Lourdes Portillo's first film, and *Chicana* (1979), a film by Sylvia Morales. But there just were not enough films being made by Latinas about Latinas in the early 1980s, so by necessity we had to look toward Latin America. So without benefit of fax, e-mail, or even a budget for phone calls, we scoured Central and Latin America and developed a collection of about fifteen films. After community-based screenings in New York City neighborhoods, we developed a discussion guide and toured it across the United States. I think we succeeded with all three goals of the project: to encourage Latinas in the United States to make films, to provide Latinas in the United States with an opportunity to see films in Spanish that reflected issues in their lives, and to highlight the accomplishments of the women who had worked hard to create these films.

PA: The educational market seems to keep this kind of filmmaking financially alive. How did you develop those ties?

DZ: The very first promotion that I ever did at WMM, which was with Lydia Pilcher (then codirector of WMM, now producer of Mira Nair's films as well as the recent HBO film *Normal* [2003]), was a film called *Being a Prisoner* (1975). We got a mailing list of people who were involved in projects around alternatives to incarceration. Women's studies departments weren't as critical to us then because, in fact, they were just being

built. So it was really about doing very targeted outreach to both feminists and nonfeminists around issues that would be of interest to them. So when we did a brochure on women's health, we sent it to nursing departments, medical departments, anybody who was involved with health care.

PA: Was this a political strategy? The political logic could have been, you need to be able to make women's issues part of all these other ongoing threads in society and make sure that women's perspectives and subjects, women's stories, are part of all those other areas.

DZ: It was much simpler than that. Here is the experience that started it off. We photocopied a flyer, which cost about $100. I used the photocopier at a foundation where I was working and the foundation's postage meter and made two thousand copies. As a result, we sold two 16-mm prints and rented it maybe four or five times. For me it was a triple-win situation: the filmmaker would be making money and getting her film out; institutions that needed to know about women's issues, not women's institutions necessarily, would be getting a film that was important to them; and WMM would make enough money to survive and distribute other films. If we kept on replicating this model, taking the money we made from sales and putting it into other promotions, we could build an organization on this.

PA: Did you have ideological discussions on the board about what is feminism, what is the women's movement, what should be the role of WMM?

DZ: The philosophical discussions we had were about the films we were acquiring. Is this a feminist film? Why is it a feminist film? Should we be taking funding from the Playboy Foundation, should we not? What does it mean for us to be doing that? How are we as an organization reflecting feminism? Those are the kinds of discussions we had. Interestingly enough, we continue to have some of the same discussions today in our acquisitions meetings. In our distribution program we only distribute films that are both made by and about women. At least that is how we describe it. But really what we are looking for are films from a woman's perspective. Well, not just a woman's perspective but a feminist perspective. But then once the word *feminism* is brought into it, one must define feminism. And there's where it gets fun and philosophical and complicated. We believe, or at least I believe, that there are many, many kinds of feminisms. And ultimately our role as an organization is to reflect that multiplicity.

But back to the history of the organization. After Punto de Vista Latina, the next major collection we worked on was the New Directions collection in 1985–86. I have to credit Jill Godmilow, the filmmaker of *Far from*

Poland (1984), for encouraging me to create this collection. The New Directions collection was centered on the critically important confluence of feminist film theory and practice, which began following the publication of feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). Many of these films were made by filmmakers who had read Mulvey's article. They were trying to come up with new forms of creating women's cinema—a cinematic approach that would hopefully contain pleasure for women but not the kind of pleasure that narrative cinema had in the past. We had been acquiring these films because of their importance in breaking new grounds in documentary and experimental film form, but it was Jill who encouraged me to put them together and promote them as a collection. Some of the films were Sally Potter's *Thriller* (1979), Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite* (1978), and Jill's own *Far from Poland.*

PA: And Yvonne Rainer?

DZ: No, there we made a big mistake. Yvonne would have fit perfectly into that collection. I thought for sure somebody else would be distributing her films, because Yvonne was like God to me then! But stupid me, nobody was distributing her. She should have been there. *Journeys from Berlin* ([1971] 1980), *A Film about A Woman Who* . . . (1974), these were—and are—critically important films. But other filmmakers that were in the collection were Trinh T. Minh-ha with *Reassemblage* (1982) and Valerie Sarmiento with *A Man, When He Is a Man* (1982). As a whole these films explored a new cinematic film language for women—both for documentary and fiction. It was a *feminist* cinematic language, one that assumed the viewer was a woman or at least had half a chance of being a woman! By putting together this collection we were saying that women are pushing the envelope in two ways. One, in terms of making us think about documentary, what is documentary and how is it constructed. And, two, how is Hollywood narrative cinema constructed and how can women change that. But we were also making another statement. We were saying that WMM is not just interested in the content of films, but we are interested in film form and the way in which women have impacted that form.

PA: There are many people for whom the mandate of developing alternative forms of expression is the essential or essentialist core of what women's filmmaking is or should be. And there is a certain mourning, especially for people of my generation, that younger people are just not with that program. What is the legacy of that earlier film movement?

DZ: I think I am in mourning, too! It's at the core of what I've been trying to figure out lately. In the later 1980s there was another generation

of videomakers, people like Sherry Millner, Vanalyne Green, Cecilia Condit, who started pushing other kinds of envelopes using the technology of video, which became very important. Their work was both politically and aesthetically concerned with the confluence of technology, feminism, identity, and politics. But by the 1990s, media production steeped in feminist film theory was on the wane. I think that the production and release of *The Gold Diggers* (Sally Potter's second film) in 1983 was the pinnacle of that feminist film theory/production paradigm. After Sally made *Thriller* (1979) for some ridiculously small amount of money, she went to the British Film Institute and got about $1 million to make *The Gold Diggers*. And a lot of people in the industry were amazed and pissed off by that.

PA: Because an art-oriented, self-reflexive feminist filmmaker had jumped out of her cultural box?

DZ: Yes, I think that was part of it. The amount of money she got at that time was extraordinary. She took an all-women crew to Iceland and shot this austere, cold, theoretical, fascinating, and amazing film in 35 mm that people hated. I think they hated it because it was the ultimate experiment: it was Laura Mulvey's (1975) article put into practice. Sally was asking, "Is there another way of creating visual pleasure?" And you know what? I think the answer is, unfortunately, no. Although for me there was intense pleasure in *The Gold Diggers* (1983), for most people there wasn't. They were very angry about not getting that pleasure. And when I say *they*, I mean men and women. Feminists liked the film more than anybody else, but women who didn't self-define themselves as feminists hated it as much as the men hated it.

There were people like B. Ruby Rich who knew exactly what Sally was doing and loved it. And there were other people who glimpsed a notion of what feminist cinema feels like and looks like and enjoyed it. There were kernels of pleasure, but as a whole, I don't know that it worked. It would be a fascinating film to look at now, but Sally pulled it out of circulation. She had to spend seven years trying to get *Orlando* (1992) made because there was just so much animosity around *The Gold Diggers*. But it would be a great thesis project for somebody to go back and read the reviews and get a sense of what the reception of that film was.

PA: What was the next step, once that theoretical movement stalled?

DZ: The next thing I think was *multiculturalism*, though I hated and still hate that word. Women Make Movies had always had a very strong commitment to multiracial issues. From the time I came to the organization, we had a commitment that the board be more than 50 percent women of color. We also were deeply committed in our acquisitions pro-

cess to finding and promoting works both by and about women of color. It just seemed natural to us: if we are committed to women being able to tell their own stories, then of course that means women of color and third-world women should be telling theirs. So by the time the U.S. educational system embraced multiculturalism, we had this collection of diverse works. New Directions brought us into the mainstream of cinema studies, because of books like Ann Kaplan's *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (1990). Our multicultural collection brought us into other kinds of classroom situations and other kinds of exhibition centers, because everybody was scrambling to be more reflective of a multicultural United States.

PA: Did you aggressively find that audience because you realized you had titles to offer? Or did filmmakers or educational institutions come to you?

DZ: I think they came to us. In fact, New Directions was not a white collection. For example, among others, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Valerie Sarmiento, and Julie Dash's films were in the collection. Second, we started seeing work by artists like Tracey Moffatt, Ngozi Onwurah, Midi Onondera, Pratibha Parmar, Laleen Jayamanne. These were women of color working outside the United States, but along the same lines as the filmmakers in New Directions. Patty White, who was then a staff member at WMM, and I created a collection called Changing the Subject: An International Exhibition of Work by Black, Asian and Latin Women from Australia, Canada, Britain and the United States. It was an entire program of works by women of color, all of whom were experimenting with form. It was kind of New Directions, part 2, in 1990.

We premiered the exhibition at Anthology Film Archives in New York. We did a beautiful flyer. And a writer wrote a damning review, in an alternative paper. She was very angry, as a woman of color, that two white women had curated this collection. She said they were all films that looked at all of the terrible things in women of color's lives and were not celebratory enough. She was extremely dismissive of the show, which just about ruined the chances of the exhibition showing anywhere else. Patty and I were devastated, but we still believed in the work. And I think if anybody looks at the work in that show, they will see that the filmmakers whose films were there have grown to be some of the most important women artists today: Tracey Moffatt, Mona Hatoum, Pratibha Parmar, Trinh T. Minh-ha.

PA: What you just described is one of the nightmares of cultural reporting and criticism in small communities. How do you cover emerging culture? You're doing just fine so long as you're pissing on some piece of

capitalist crap. Everybody in every possible left persuasion knows what they think about *Star Wars: Episode II* (2002), and most of them went to it. So it's easy to take potshots at the popular. But what about the world of emerging expression? What do you cover, and how do you cover it? You don't want to just write cheerleading stuff. There is a lot of really bad, unproductive art out there in the margins, in the emerging expressions, just like there is everywhere else. There's no reason why these film- and videomakers are any more likely to end up with a higher percentage of great art. On the other hand, when it's not what you wish it would be, it is much easier to squish that little one.

What I learned as an *In These Times* cultural editor was that every sort of emergent expression comes out of small, rooted, intense community expression. A prime example is the women's movement, which might or might not connect to other movements that are small and idiosyncratic and run by people who have a particular driving passion. You tell a broad range of people in many different communities like that, hey, an exciting thing is happening over here in this one. The primary reaction is, first of all, I don't care; it is over there. Second, if you are going to cover that, then why aren't you covering my thing? And the third reaction is, of course, along an age basis; you are covering those people who we haven't even heard of, and why haven't you covered my artist whose latest CD I always buy?

So I think it's very important journalistically to open up, for readers, the interesting questions in cultural production, so that the critical questions can get beyond "is this good or bad" and into the questions of how it got produced, how does it enhance the range of possibilities for us all, and what does it connect to. You have to develop categories that make some kind of sense beyond consumer categories. That's why I keep arguing that we need to identify and use and describe "electronic public spaces," whether they're on public TV or public access TV or on the Internet, places that are zoned specifically to public life and the communication that makes it come alive.

It's not enough to have cultural expression. You need zones in which to interact with it and about it. For instance, there's plenty of online-only criticism, but it is very difficult to create Internet-based critical sites where you involve people in a conversation that goes beyond self-marginalizing. And these emerging cultures should engage people beyond the originating community. Of course there's also an understandable comfort in self-marginalizing, in knowing that you're completely victimized and can do nothing. But it usually doesn't take you places.

DZ: There is not enough criticism, not enough outlets for independent

media. And by the way, that critic's pan of Changing the Subject would not have bothered me if it was an honest critique of the work. I think what she was doing was slamming the show because the curators were white. And you know what, if she had written that in the article, had based her criticism on that overtly, that would have been fine. I was and still am deeply committed to self-expression. There were back then, and probably always will be, too many white curators curating the work of artists of color. But the problem was that she took her frustrations out on the work, rather than us. We took a chance in putting together the show because we were committed to this particular kind of work getting screened and felt that the work could speak for itself.

One could say that the 1970s to mid-1980s was the time of theoretical concerns and the mid-1980s to early 1990s was the time of multicultur-alism. This brought into view cultural identity. And cultural identity, to me, brought forward personal filmmaking. I think that's the track that we've been on since. Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* came out in 1986, Michael Moore made *Roger and Me* in 1989, and all of a sudden everyone seemed to be talking about personal cinema. Women had been doing this for years, but when they made their personal films, people said "Yuk, it's too personal." When Jill Godmilow made *Far from Poland* (1984), she got slammed for putting herself and her boyfriend in it, and for having the nerve to have an imaginary conversation with Fidel Castro. That was one of the reasons why Jill encouraged me to put together the New Directions collection. And then four years later *Roger and Me* comes out, and it is heralded as this kind of new documentary.

PA: It was also a time when new institutional experiments were starting. In the mid-1980s, Britain's Channel 4—which at the time was noncom-mercial—offered workshops for young people of color, which then created the pool of filmmakers that you showcased in New Directions II. In the United States, indies were organizing for a decade to leverage resources in public television, and finally in 1989 they achieved the creation of the Independent Television Service (ITVS), to produce TV for "underserved" audiences. Did ITVS have an effect on WMM like Channel 4 did?

DZ: There was so little tradition before ITVS of American filmmakers producing for television that ITVS ended up taking on a job that it didn't expect to take on—teaching filmmakers how to make films for television. Channel 4's project was very different, since the organizing principle of the workshops came out of multiculturalism. The workshop system fed the programming for Channel 4, which fed the WMM collection. These workshops were founded around the principle of cultural identity—whether it was regional identity or ethnic identity. And the workshops

were about experimentation in a way that ITVS has never been able to be about, because it's mandated to produce TV programs, not to incubate talent.

PA: Independent filmmakers pressured to create it, and Congress forced the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to allocate some of its funding to ITVS. So it started out with the parent who hates the child—fortunately the relationship is better now. But the other thing that was really devastating is that ITVS was created with absolutely no access to public television distribution. This is the first year in which ITVS has at least coprogramming power over a series, Independent Lens.

DZ: When ITVS was created, I was so sure that this would not impact on us at all that I removed myself from the discussion. I was astounded to find five years later that WMM was distributing more films produced by ITVS than any other distributor. So although women may or may not have been part of their mission, they did in fact support a considerable number of women filmmakers. I would say of the films we distribute now, maybe two a year are ITVS funded.

But back to the timeline. So multiculturalism became personal identity became personal documentary. Personal narrative is going nowhere. I am waiting to see what is next, and I think it's happening internationally.

Increasingly, WMM has become an international organization, looking at what women are doing worldwide. This had its roots in the 1985 UN Conference on Women in Nairobi. I was asked to take part in the organizing committee and got to go to Nairobi because of the Canadian government (the U.S. government wouldn't pay for it). Thank goodness for Canada. While there I got to meet twenty-five women from around the world, all of whom were either filmmakers or working in the infrastructure of the women's film community. Although we never met again as a group, I am still in touch with many of those women, and their work continues to inform ours.

It is not something that a lot of people, even feminists, in the United States understand—how incredibly vibrant, alive, and proactive feminism is all over the world. And how many different kinds of feminisms there are. For example, what is happening in Asia right now is extraordinary. Fifteen years ago we could barely find a film by an Asian woman director. Fifteen years later there is a women's film festival in Seoul with sold-out audiences—there were even two hundred boys and girls who vied to be the volunteers at the festival. And the ones that were chosen proudly walked around with Women's Film Festival T-shirts. There is a women's film festival in Taiwan, which is going into its ninth year. In Tokyo there

is a women's section at that festival. There has just been an explosion in filmmaking by Asian women.

PA: What films from elsewhere are watched in the United States?

DZ: Right now, we feel it is a very important part of our mission to get films screened on television in the United States that look at the lives of women in other countries, because oftentimes those are the most misrepresented people that we see on television. What we are interested in doing is presenting stories of success or of local solutions to global and local problems. For example one of the films we distribute is *Made in India* (1998), which is about SEWA (the Self-Employed Women's Association) and the microeconomy movement in India. We also work alongside feminists in the United States who are working on important issues of women and human rights. Charlotte Bunch is a hero as far as I am concerned; she was really able to make a whole movement—the human rights movement—take notice of women's issues.

PA: Where is the intersection between that innovation, for bringing women's issues into human rights, and filmmaking? Is *Calling the Ghosts* (1996) a good example of that? *Calling the Ghosts* was backed by Amnesty International, and Soros Documentary Fund put money into it, because it is an example of a civil society initiative in which a women's force is creating a recognition of rape as a war crime. So Soros isn't funding a woman filmmaker on women's issues; it is funding it as human rights. Does WMM have a role in creating bridges like that?

DZ: *Calling the Ghosts* was, I believe, part of our production assistance program, and we worked collaboratively with Amnesty International on a twenty-city tour of the film. It was a wonderful collaboration, a very successful one. We got the film placed in museums and film societies and media art centers and theaters. Alongside those screenings, they were doing screenings with community organizations and universities. So we were really reaching very different audiences with the same film.

We're putting a huge effort into *Señorita Extraviada* (2001), Lourdes Portillo's extraordinary film on Ciudad Juarez, which is a film that is deeply important to us because of the issue—the women who've been murdered on the border of Mexico. We make a very conscious choice to put additional resources into films for which we feel we have an obligation to create visibility for the issue, not just for the film. Another film we did this with is *Warrior Marks* (1993), Pratibha Parmar and Alice Walker's film on female genital mutilation, which was really the first time that issue was brought to the American public. Of course, we were helped by the fact that someone as well known as Alice Walker made the film. As a result,

Jane Pauley interviewed her on the *Today Show*. This was a film that did its job in that it really provoked discussion about the issue; it was a very controversial film. Many African women did not like it. I still absolutely have no problem defending why we distributed that film. Yes, it is problematic in some ways—it is always difficult to make a film about the clash of culture and tradition—but the issue has to be spoken about. That's also why we're distributing Kim Longinotto's *The Day I Will Never Forget* (2002), which is also about female genital mutilation.

PA: So where are we today with films and feminism?

DZ: It still is really difficult for women filmmakers. This is true in documentary, in fiction film, in independent film, and in the industry. Most of the people who are greenlighting films in Hollywood are still men. We did an analysis six years ago of the funding patterns. We compared the gender of the producer/directors as well as the subjects of the films they were making in the context of the funding they were receiving from national and regional funders. At the very top were films by men about men, and at the very bottom were films by women about women. Most interesting to me is that women who are making films about men get more money than men who are making films about women. Although this was six years ago, if you look at the films getting made in Hollywood or even shown in the major film festivals, things have not changed very much.

PA: What are some of the criteria you use when you are trying to decide if WMM will pick up a film?

DZ: The simple answer is that the quality of the film is critically important to us. We feel a deep responsibility to show the very best films. And this is true whether there is a strong market for those films or not. We have a real commitment to discovering emerging new filmmakers who really need the help of an organization like WMM in order to get their work out. This year there is a film that we are doing that is going to be very hard for us to distribute. It's called *Through the Skin* (2002), and it's by a young, first-time filmmaker, Elyse Montague. It is a beautiful but challenging, abstract piece about gender confusion. The problem is that audiences need help in understanding how to "read" experimental films. We are trying to package it with other films, because many gay and lesbian festivals said they liked the film but didn't know how to show it. *Silent Song* (2001) is another short experimental film we are distributing. It's a beautiful film, part of a trilogy about the Holocaust by Elida Schogt. The first film in the trilogy, *Zyklon Portrait* (1999), won an award at IDFA a couple of years ago. For us these are new voices, new talent, and we have a commitment to that.

In terms of issue films by established and emerging filmmakers, we have a different set of criteria. We ask how important is the issue and look at whether there is a critical analysis as well as an exposition of the problem. We are less interested in films that are looking at a problem than in films that are looking at the root causes of the problems or how women are trying to find solutions to those problems. But of course there are exceptions. We just picked up a really strong film called *This Is Not Living* (2001), which is about Palestinian women living in Ramallah. It's about the reality of their daily lives. When we picked it up we had wonderful discussions about it, because it is as close to propaganda as one could get. It is one-sided, without any doubt. And when we talked about it I said very strongly, as a Jewish woman living in the United States, I am even more committed to distributing this film because this is what we don't get in the media in the United States. We never see this side. So yes, it is one-sided, but it is actually balancing the information that we are getting in the United States. On the other hand, at the same time, we picked up a wonderful film by an Israeli woman, *For My Children* (2000). Her perspective is a left perspective in Israel. It is about her trying to decide if she can continue to live in Israel, given what is happening in that country. There's a defining moment in that film when she says that every generation of her family has moved, have been immigrants and emigrants. Not one generation has grown up in the country they've been born in. So she must question her desire to leave Israel because she is then continuing that pattern of emigration and exile. For me, just thinking about that gave us another insight into people's lives in Israel.

We look at so many films each year, hundreds, sometimes thousands. Slowly, themes start emerging, and we are sometimes able to put films together in collections. I always credit our filmmakers with pushing us forward in new directions, because it is really looking at their work that helps us decide where our focus areas are going to be. But it's frustrating that our resources are limited. This year there is a very good film by Randi Cecchine about polycystic ovarian syndrome that we have not been able to acquire. If we were doing anything on women's health this year, we would distribute this film. But we are not. We are doing a collection on women and the global economy, a number of films on the Middle East, and a new African collection. So we would not do Cecchine's film justice.

PA: Your price to higher education is ten times the individual rate. The institutional sales make the entire operation viable. So higher education is critical.

DZ: Well, there is a reason for that pricing! First of all, independent films, and in particular documentaries, don't have the type of home video

market that would make home video pricing feasible. Hollywood films sell millions of tapes; we sell hundreds. Second, when an institution buys a film at institutional prices, hundreds, sometimes thousands of students are able to see that one tape. So if the pricing were based on the number of people screening the actual video, the price should actually be much higher! But because the prices are high we need people like you to write about them and create the need to collect it. Academics need to read about the films in articles and in books. We've also learned that graduate students are really important. They are often the ones doing the work on new films that they are then bringing into the course curriculum when they begin to teach. One of the things that is most exciting to me right now is that we are working with a second generation of academics: young men and women who started seeing WMM films when they were studying. They are extremely film literate and know the WMM collection well, even before they begin to teach.

PA: Can a film skip a debut in a theater or at a festival—on a big screen? Could you simply put a film in your catalog at this point that hasn't gone to a festival and assume there is a content interest that has already developed?

DZ: Yes, that is happening now, but with the Web, not actually the catalog. The turnaround time for the catalog is up to a year. People are buying titles right off the Web site, films that have just been released and not been to festivals. But they have to be films on subjects that people are interested in or films whose subjects are already part of course curriculum.

PA: Tell me more about pathways to recognition and into the catalog, like festivals.

DZ: The reason we have a need for festivals is because of the lack of opportunity in the theatrical arena. Festivals take the place of a theatrical release. Festivals, along with a handful of museums and media art centers, give us the opportunity to get press on our films, to have them written about. The actual number of people who actually go see a film is much less than the number who read about films. And having them read about these films is deeply important.

PA: How do you think you're making a difference now?

DZ: We do two very important and different things. One is infiltration. So the infiltration we do is getting our films into Harvard Medical School, so that doctors, male doctors, get a chance to see women's health from a woman's perspective during their training. The other part of it is about empowerment, which is about women being able to see themselves on film in a very different way, in a way that more accurately reflects their

lives. But I am not interested in one without the other. If you go back to my epiphany, my moment sitting in the barn in the 1970s, it was about sitting in a room full of women and watching women's films. But at the same time there is just no way that I would devote the energy that I devote to not getting the widest possible audience to see the films that we distribute.

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Chicana. 1979. Directed by Sylvia Morales. Los Angeles: Sylvan Productions. Distributed by Women Make Movies.
Daughter Rite. 1978. Directed by Michelle Citron. Self-produced. Distributed by Women Make Movies.
The Day I Will Never Forget. 2002. Directed by Kim Longinotto. London: Vixen Films. Distributed by Women Make Movies.
Far from Poland. 1984. Directed by Jill Goodmilow. New York: Living Archives. Distributed by Women Make Movies.
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Normal. 2003. Directed by Jane Anderson. Los Angeles: Avenue Pictures in association with HBO.

Orlando. 1992. Directed by Sally Potter. Culver City, Calif.: Columbia/TriStar Pictures.

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Roger and Me. 1989. Directed by Michael Moore. Burbank, Calif.: Warner Brothers.

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Silent Song. 2001. Directed by Elida Schogt. Toronto: Wandering Tulip Productions. Distributed by Women Make Movies.

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Thriller. 1979. Directed by Sally Potter. Self-produced, London. Distributed by Women Make Movies.

Through the Skin. 2002. Directed by Elyse Montague. Self-produced. Distributed by Women Make Movies.

Warrior Marks. 1993. Directed by Pratibha Parmar, with Alice Walker. London: Hauer Rawlence Productions in association with Our Daughters Have Mothers. Distributed by Women Make Movies.

Why Women Stay. 1980. A video by Jacqueline Shortell McSweeney and Debra Zimmerman. Video documentary. New York: Women Make Movies.

Zyklon Portrait. 1999. Directed by Elida Schogt. Toronto: Wandering Tulip Productions. Distributed by Women Make Movies.

Recommended Viewing

The following highly diverse list of recommended media texts has been compiled by this issue's editors and contributors, who were asked to submit the titles of five of their favorite and/or critically important feminist works of film, television, or digital moving image art.[1]

Adynata (Leslie Thornton, United States, 1983)

Ali, or Fear Eats the Soul (Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Germany, 1974)

All That Heaven Allows (Douglas Sirk, United States, 1956)

Annie Hall (Woody Allen, United States, 1977)

The Apple (Samira Makhmalbaf, Iran/France, 1998)

Baise-Moi (Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh Thi, France, 2000)

The Ballad of Little Jo (Maggie Greenwald, United States, 1993)

Barrier Device (Grace Lee, United States, 2002)

The Battle of Algiers (Gillo Pontecorvo, Algeria/Italy, 1965)

Belle de Jour (Luis Buñuel, France/Italy, 1967)

The Body Beautiful (Ngozi Onwurah, United Kingdom, 1991)

Bound (Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski, United States, 1996)

Breaking the Waves (Lars von Trier, Denmark/Sweden/France, 1996)

La Captive (Chantal Akerman, France/Belgium, 2000)

Capturing the Friedmans (Andrew Jarecki, United States, 2003)

Carmelita Tropicana: Your Kunst ils Your Waffen (Ela Troyano, United States, 1994)

Ceddo (Ousmane Sembene, Senegal, 1977)

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[1] Most of the information in this list comes from the Internet Movie Database, which is available online at http://www.imdb.com. We also recommend that readers consult Women Make Movies (http://www.wmm.com) and the Video Data Bank (http://www.vdb.org).

Charulata (Satyajit Ray, India, 1964)

Christmas on Earth (Barbara Rubin, United States, 1963)

Cleo from 5 to 7 (Agnès Varda, France/Italy, 1961)

Cornered (Adrian Piper, United States, 1988, video installation)

Damned if You Don't (Su Friedrich, United States, 1987)

Daughters of the Dust (Julie Dash, United States, 1991)

The Day I Became a Woman (Marzieh Meshkini, Iran, 2000)

Desert Hearts (Donna Deitch, United States, 1985)

The Devil Never Sleeps (Lourdes Portillo, Mexico/United States, 1994)

A Different Image (Alile Sharon Larkin, United States, 1982)

Dona Flor and Her Two Husbands (Bruno Barreto, Brazil, 1976)

Dormimundo: Volume One (Ximena Cuevas, Mexico, 1999)

Everyone's Child (Tsitsi Dangarembga, Zimbabwe, 1996)

Eve's Bayou (Kasi Lemmons, United States, 1997)

Fly (John Lennon and Yoko Ono, United States, 1970)

Fuses (Carolee Schneemann, United States, 1967)

Fusion Cuisine (Fatimah Tuggar, United States, 2000, video installation)

A Girl's Own Story (Jane Campion, Australia, 1984)

The Girls (Mai Zetterling, Sweden, 1968)

The Gleaners and I (Agnès Varda, France, 2000)

The Gold Diggers (Sally Potter, United Kingdom, 1983)

The Graduate (Mike Nichols, United States, 1967)

The Great Invisible (Leslie Thornton, United Kingdom, 1990–present)

Heart Like a Wheel (Jonathan Kaplan, United States, 1983)

The Heiress (William Wyler, United States, 1949)

A Hidden Life (Suzana Amaral, Brazil, 2001)

High Heels (Pedro Almodóvar, Spain/France, 1991)

High Tide (Gillian Armstrong, Australia, 1987)

Hindle Wakes (Maurice Elvey, United Kingdom, 1927)

I Can't Sleep (Claire Denis, France/Switzerland, 1994)

Illusions (Julie Dash, United States, 1982)

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (Chantal Akerman, Belgium/France, 1976)

Jesus' Son (Alison Maclean, Canada/United States, 1999)

The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter (Connie Field, United States, 1980)

Losing Ground (Kathleen Collins, United States, 1982)

Love Is a Treasure (Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Finland, 2002)

The May Lady (Rakhshan Bani Etemad, Iran, 1998)

Mayhem (Abigail Child, United States, 1987)

Measures of Distance (Mona Hatoum, United Kingdom, 1988, video)

Meshes of the Afternoon (Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid, United States, 1943)

Monster (Patty Jenkins, United States/Germany, 2003)

Morvern Callar (Lynne Ramsay, United Kingdom, 2002)

The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo (Susana Blaustein Muñoz and Lourdes Portillo, Argentina, 1985)

MTV Videos (MTV, United States, 1981–present)

Near Dark (Kathryn Bigelow, United States, 1987)

Nest of Tens (Miranda July, United States, 2000)

News from Home (Chantal Akerman, France/Belgium/Germany, 1977)

Nice Coloured Girls (Tracey Moffatt, Australia, 1987)

Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy (Tracey Moffatt, Australia, 1989)

Not for Sale: Feminism and Art in the USA during the 1970s (Laura Cottingham, United States, 1998, video)

La Nouba (Assia Djebbar, Algeria, 1979)

Once Were Warriors (Lee Tamahori, New Zealand, 1994)

Out of the Past (Jacques Tourneur, United States, 1947)

Peggy and Fred in Hell (Leslie Thornton, United States, 1985–present)

Phineas Slipped (Keri Oakie, United States, 2003)

The Piano (Jane Campion, Australia/New Zealand/France, 1993)

Privilege (Yvonne Rainer, United States, 1990)

A Question of Silence (Marleen Gorris, Netherlands, 1982)

Ratcatcher (Lynne Ramsay, United Kingdom/France, 1999)

Real Sex (HBO, United States, 2000–present)

A Real Young Girl (Catherine Breillat, France, 1976)

The River (Jean Renoir, France/India/United States, 1951)

Safe (Todd Haynes, United Kingdom/United States, 1995)

Semiotics of the Kitchen (Martha Rosler, United States, 1975, video)

Señorita Extraviada (Lourdes Portillo, Mexico, 2001)

Sex and the City (HBO, United States, 2000–2004)

Showgirls (Paul Verhoeven, France/United States, 1995)

Sidet: Forced Exile (Salem Mekuria, United States/Ethiopia, 1991)

La Signora di Tutti (Max Ophüls, Italy, 1934)

Sound of Steps (Denise Gonçalves, Brazil, 1995)

The Story of Adele H. (François Truffaut, France, 1975)

Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story (Todd Haynes, United States, 1987)

Surname Viet Given Name Nam (Trinh T. Minh-ha, United States, 1989)

Sweetie (Jane Campion, Australia, 1989)

Talk to Her (Pedro Almodóvar, Spain, 2002)

Ten (Abbas Kiarostami, France/Iran/United States, 2002)

Thriller (Sally Potter, United Kingdom, 1979)

Travellers (Bahram Beizai, Iran, 1992)

Under the Skin (Carine Adler, United Kingdom, 1997)

Under the Skin of the City (Rakhshan Bani Etemad, Iran, 2001)

Vertical Roll (Joan Jonas, United States, 1972)

Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock, United States, 1958)

The Watermelon Woman (Cheryl Dunye, United States, 1996)

With Babies and Banners: Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade (Anne Bohlen, Lyn Goldfarb, and Lorraine Gray, United States, 1978)

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown (Pedro Almodóvar, Spain, 1988)

Xala (Ousmane Sembene, Senegal, 1975)

United States and International Notes

A multidisciplinary conference on "Feminist Epistemologies, Methodologies, Metaphysics, and Science Studies (FEMMSS)" will be held at the University of Washington in Seattle from November 5–7, 2004. The conference will provide a forum in which scholars, scientists, activists, and students can consider the diversity of feminist analyses in these areas, both as they diverge from established traditions and as they extend some of the more promising lines now emerging within them. For more information, see http://depts.washington.edu/femmss/.

Calls for papers

Feminist Theory announces a forthcoming issue on beauty, to be edited by Claire Colebrook and Rita Felski. Essays are invited that move beyond the now well-established critique of the beauty myth to develop new perspectives on the question of beauty and gender. Possible topics might include makeup, fashion, and bodily transformations as ways of reconstructing the self; feminist perspectives on the "beauty boom" in literary and art criticism; reevaluations of "male gaze" theory and its reduction of beauty to a fetish; male beauty and the making over of masculinity (the "metrosexual"); nonvisual theorizations of beauty in musicology and other fields; and cross-cultural beauty practices. Manuscripts should not exceed 8,000 words and should be addressed to an international and interdisciplinary readership familiar with current debates in feminist theory. *Feminist Theory* uses the Harvard referencing style. The deadline for submissions is July 15, 2005. Please send your manuscript, with diskette, to Rita Felski, English Department, University of Virginia, 219 Bryan Hall, P.O. Box 400121, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4121, or e-mail it as an attachment to rf6d@virginia.edu.

Intersections: Gender, History, and Culture in the Asian Context seeks submissions for a special issue on "Single Women, Widows, and Divorcees." *Intersections* emphasizes the paramount importance of research into the region's multiple historical and cultural gender patterns—patterns that are crucial for the understanding of contemporary globalized societies, where identities and social relations are constantly being negotiated against the background of dominant narratives. The deadline for submissions is March 15, 2006. Submissions should be e-mailed to intersect@central.murdoch.edu.au or sent to the Editors, *Intersections*, SSHE, Murdoch University, South Street, WA 6150, Australia.

Chicana/Latina Studies, an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed, biannual publication of the national collective Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (Women Active in Research and Social Change), seeks review essays, research articles, literary criticism, and creative writing that explore the Chicana/Latina experience. For all matters of style, especially for notes and references, consult the fifteenth edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The journal uses the author-date documentation style. The journal has no manuscript page minimum or maximum but prefers scholarly articles of 5,000 words or 25 pages (not including tables, notes, or references), commentary articles of fewer than 2,500 words, and review articles of approximately 1,000 words. Submissions may be sent to Karen Mary Davalos, Chicana/o Studies Department, Loyola Marymount University-UNH 4419, One LMU Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045.

The Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Culture (*EWIC*), a broad-based, interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, transhistorical encyclopedia focusing specifically on women in Islamic cultures but also including non-Muslim women in cultures where Islam has had a significant presence, will be published by Brill (Leiden) as a 4-million-word, six-volume set. The editors are in the process of soliciting authors for *EWIC* entries and are creating a database with names and coordinates of possible contributors to the project. To propose a contribution, visit http://sjoseph.ucdavis.edu/ewic.

Call for artwork

Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society seeks submissions for cover art. Published quarterly by the University of Chicago Press and distributed internationally, *Signs* is an interdisciplinary academic journal that focuses on issues of gender, race, class, nation, and sexuality. Submissions are not limited by style or medium (photography and film stills are welcome) but should reproduce well in black and white; content should represent a point of view on women's issues. One full-color cover will be published annually. Send up to ten labeled slide duplicates to Art Editor, *Signs*, University of California, Los Angeles, 1400H Public Policy Building, Box 957122, Los Angeles, CA 90095-7122. E-mail signs@signs.ucla.edu. A small honorarium is available. Deadline is ongoing.

About the Contributors

Pat Aufderheide, a critic and scholar of independent media, has written most recently *The Daily Planet: A Critic on the Capitalist Cultural Beat* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) and *Communications Policy and the Public Interest: The Telecommunications Act of 1996* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999). She is an editor of the left newspaper *In These Times* and has written for a wide array of magazines and journals. She teaches at the American University, where she directs the Center for Social Media.

Mary Ann Doane is George Hazard Crooker Professor of Modern Culture and Media and of English at Brown University. She is the author of *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Anna Everett is associate professor of film, TV, and new media studies and director of the Center for Black Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her books and articles include *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909–1949* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); "The Revolution Will Be Digitized: Afrocentricity and the Digital Public Sphere," *Social Text* 71 (Summer 2002): 125–46; and, coedited with John T. Caldwell, *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality* (New York: Routledge, 2003). She founded and edits the newsletter *Screening Noir*.

Nicole R. Fleetwood (nrfleetwood@ucdavis.edu) is assistant professor of American studies at the University of California, Davis. She researches and teaches in the areas of visual culture, technology studies, gender theory, and race and representation. Currently she is completing a manuscript on visuality, the discourse of blackness, and gender relations.

Jane Gaines is professor of literature and English and the director of the Film/Video/Digital Culture Program at Duke University. She is the author of two award-winning books, *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice, and the Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) and *Fire and Desire: Mixed-Race Movies in the Silent Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Currently she is completing "Fictioning Histories: Women Film Pioneers" at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University.

Rita Gonzalez is assistant curator and special assistant to the chief curator of the Center for Art of the Americas at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Gonzalez is also completing her dissertation in the department of Film, Television and Digital Media at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is coauthor (with Jesse Lerner) of *Mexperimental Cinema/Cine Mexperimental: 60 Years of Avant-Garde Media Arts from Mexico* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Smart Art Press, 1998).

Laleen Jayamanne is professor of cinema studies in the department of art history and theory at the University of Sydney. Her publications include *Kiss Me Deadly: Feminism and Cinema for the Moment* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1996) and *Toward Cinema and Its Double: Cross-Cultural Mimesis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). She is currently writing a book on the cinema of Kumar Shahani.

Liza Johnson (liza@speakeasy.net) is assistant professor of art at Williams College. Her films and videos include *Good Sister/Bad Sister* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: True Enough Productions, 1996); *Giftwrap* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: True Enough Productions, 1998); and *Fernweh/The Opposite of Homesick* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: True Enough Productions; Berlin: DAAD Berlin Kunstlerprogram, 2000). She is the curator of recent media exhibitions and programs at the Asia Society Museum in New York, at the Williams College Museum of Art, and at the MIX-NY Lesbian and Gay Experimental Film and Video Festival.

E. Ann Kaplan is professor of English and comparative literature at State University of New York at Stony Brook, where she also founded and directs the Humanities Institute. Current president of the Society for Film and Media Studies, she has written and edited many books and articles, the most recent of which are *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997); *Feminism and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and, coedited with Susan Squier, *Playing Dolly: Technocultural Formations, Fantasies, and Fictions of Assisted Reproduction* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

Annette Kuhn is professor of film studies at Lancaster University. She is the author of many contributions to film feminisms, including *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (1982; rev. ed., London: Pandora, 1994) and *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1985), and the editor of *The Women's Companion to International Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Her latest book is *Dreaming of Fred and Ginger: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

Helen Lee is a Toronto-based filmmaker. Her work, including *Sally's Beauty Spot* (New York: Women Make Movies, 1990); *My Niagara* (New York: Women Make Movies, 1992); *Prey* (New York: Women Make Movies, 1995); *Subrosa* (New York:

Women Make Movies, 2000); and *The Art of Woo* (Toronto: Odeon Films/Canadian Film Centre, 2001), has screened at numerous festivals and events internationally. She is currently working on several projects, including the film adaptation of Kerri Sakamoto's novel, *The Electrical Field* (New York: Norton, 1999), as well as an original screenplay titled "Ventura," a road movie being planned as an official Canada-Korea coproduction.

Judith Mayne is Distinguished Humanities Professor and professor of French and women's studies at The Ohio State University. She is the author of several books, including *Directed by Dorothy Arzner* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1994) and *Framed: Lesbians, Feminists, and Media Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

Kathleen McHugh (mchughla@ucla.edu) teaches English and film and television at the University of California, Los Angeles. In *American Domesticity: From How-To Manual to Hollywood Melodrama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) she reconsiders melodrama and the feminist commentary applied to it in relation to representations of domestic labor in the United States. She has published articles on domesticity, feminism, melodrama, the avant-garde, and autobiography in such journals as *Cultural Studies*, *Jump Cut*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, and *Velvet Light Trap*. She is currently completing a book-length study of Jane Campion's films, coediting a book on South Korean Golden Age melodramas, and editing a book on collaborative autobiographies in the Americas.

Negar Mottahedeh (negar@duke.edu) is professor of film and literature and the cocurator of *Reel Evil: Films from the Axis of Evil* series at Duke University. She wrote her doctoral thesis on the history of visual productions in nineteenth-century Iran. Her work has been published in *camera obscura*, *Signs*, *Iranian Studies*, *Radical History Review*, and *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*. Her monograph on national variations in cinematic language and the new Iranian cinema will be out in 2005.

Laura Mulvey is professor of film and media studies at Birkbeck College, University of London. She has been writing essays and books about film and film theory since the mid-1970s, including *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1982); *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstroke: Macmillan, 1989); and *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). She has also codirected six films, among them *Riddles of the Sphinx* (New York: Women Make Movies, 1978). She also codirected a documentary, *Disgraced Monuments* (New York: Cinema Guild, 1993), with artist/filmmaker Mark Lewis.

Frances Negrón-Muntaner is an award-winning filmmaker, writer, and scholar. She is the recipient of Ford, Truman, Scripps Howard, Rockefeller, and Pew Fellowships. Her latest book is *Boricua Pop: Puerto Ricans and the Latinization of Amer-*

ican Culture (New York: New York University Press, 2004). She is currently completing two documentaries, *For the Record: Guam in WWII* and *Regarding Vieques*. Negrón-Muntaner is also a founding board member and chair of the National Association of Latino Independent Producers. She teaches Caribbean and Latino cultures and literature at Columbia University.

Patrice Petro is professor of film studies and director of the Center for International Education at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee. She is the author of *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002) and editor of several books, most recently, with Linda Krause, *Global Cities: Cinema, Architecture, and Urbanism in a Digital Age* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

Lynne Ramsay is a Scottish film director. She graduated in 1995 from the National Film and Television School in the United Kingdom. Her work includes the 1995 film *Ratcatcher* and the 2002 film *Morvern Callar*. She is currently working on a film adaptation of Alice Sebold's novel *The Lovely Bones*.

Judylyn S. Ryan (jsryan@owu.edu) is assistant professor of English at Ohio Wesleyan University, where she teaches courses on African American literature, black feminist theory, black women's cinema, and African diaspora cultural studies in literature and film. Her articles have been published in *Toni Morrison: Theoretical and Critical Approaches*, ed. Nancy J. Peterson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), *Modern Fiction Studies*, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*; and *Critical Voicings of Black Liberation: Resistance and Representations in the Americas*, ed. Kimberley L. Phillips (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2003). Her forthcoming book, "Spirituality as Ideology in Black Women's Film and Literature," will be published by the University of Virginia Press in 2005.

Celine Parreñas Shimizu is assistant professor in Asian American studies and film at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She is also the award-winning and internationally screened filmmaker of *Mahal Means Love and Expensive* (independently produced, 1993); *Her Uprooting Plants Her* (New York: Third World Newsreel, 1995); *Super Flip* (independently produced, 1997); and *The Fact of Asian Women* (independently produced, 2002). Her book, *The Hypersexuality of Race*, is forthcoming from Duke University Press. She is currently working on her next project, "Birthright," and the book manuscript "In Asian Women: Sexing Race on Screen and Scene."

Vivian Sobchack is associate dean and professor of film, television, and digital media at the UCLA School of Theater, Film, and Television and was the first woman elected president of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. She has edited two anthologies, *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) and *The Persistence*

of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event (New York: Routledge, 1996). Her own books include *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997); *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); and *Carnal Thoughts: Bodies, Embodiment, and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Lynn Spigel is professor of film and television studies in the School of Communication Studies at Northwestern University. She is the author of *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001). She has edited and contributed to numerous anthologies and is editor of the "Console-ing Passions" book series at Duke University Press.

Linda Williams is professor and director of the Program in Film Studies and the Center for New Media at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (1989; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) and *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O. J. Simpson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Debra Zimmerman has been executive director of Women Make Movies, the non-profit feminist film distributor, since 1983. Women Make Movies, which had its origins in 1972 in the movement to teach disenfranchised groups media skills, has become a premier independent distributor and major vehicle to get women's films into theaters, on television, in schools, and into communities. This organization now acquires some twenty-five to thirty films a year, half of them from outside the United States.

Guidelines for Contributors

The editors invite submission of article-length manuscripts that might appropriately be published in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. We publish articles from a wide range of disciplines in a variety of voices—articles engaging gender, race, culture, class, nation, and/or sexuality. We are looking for lively, provocative essays that launch new inquiries or prompt intense debate; we publish essays not only in areas of scholarship familiar to *Signs* readers but in newly emergent fields relevant to women and gender as well. Essays may be discipline specific if they are cross-disciplinary in their theorizing, their methodology, or their sources.

Signs does not consider manuscripts that are under review elsewhere or that have been previously published. *Signs* does not accept unsolicited book reviews.

Each author (or set of coauthors) will receive 10 copies of the issue or a year's subscription (or renewal).

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All articles published in *Signs* are peer reviewed.

Preparation of copy

1. Articles should not exceed a maximum length of 10,000 words, including references and endnotes. Please indicate the word count on the title page.

2. Type all copy—including endnotes and reference list—double-spaced on standard bond paper, allowing generous margins on the top, bottom, and sides.

3. A separate title page should include the article title and the author's name, postal address, telephone number, e-mail address, and fax number, if available. The first page of the manuscript should have the article title 2 inches from the top of the page. The text should start 2 inches below the title. To protect anonymity, the author's name *should not* appear on the manuscript, and all references in the body of the text and in endnotes that might identify the author to the reviewer should be removed and cited on a separate page. Articles that do not conform to these specifications will be returned to authors.

4. A high-quality photocopy of each illustration should accompany the manuscript. Reproduction-quality prints of illustrations will be required for manuscripts accepted for publication.

5. Submissions for regular issues should include a cover page with identifying information, 3 copies of the manuscript, and 3 copies of an abstract (of not more than 150 words). Please include a 3 1/2-inch high-density disk copy of the essay and abstract, preferably in MSWord (please specify word-processing software on disk). Send submission materials to the Editors, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, University of California, Los Angeles, 1400H Public Policy Building,

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Citations and references

Submissions should follow the author-date system of documentation, with limited endnotes, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style* (14th ed.). (See chapter 16 outlining documentation for the social sciences.) The journal office may request full revision of manuscripts not meeting the *CMS* requirements for documentation.

References to works are given in the text in chronological order by enclosing the author's last name and the year of publication in parentheses (Miller 1978) and are keyed to an alphabetical list of references at the end of the article. Specific page or section references follow the date, preceded by a comma (Miller 1978, 234). Other examples are: (Miller and Jones 1978) for dual authorship; (Miller et al. 1978) for more than three authors; (Miller 1978a, 1978b) for two works by the same author in a single year; (Smith 1982; Chanock 1985; Robertson and Berger 1986) for two or more works by different authors.

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Thanks to Reviewers

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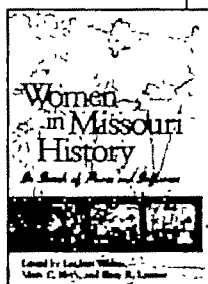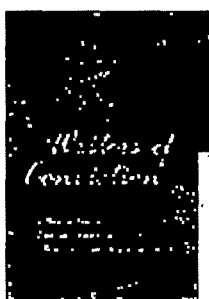
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Written inquiries should be addressed to the Manager, Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies, Department of History, 129 Dickinson Hall, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544-1017, U.S.A. Applications can be made online at http://davisctr.princeton.edu/program/application.php. The deadline for applications and letters of recommendation for fellowships for 2005/2006 is December 1, 2004. Scholars who would like to offer a paper to one of the weekly Seminars are asked to send a brief description of their proposal and current curriculum vitae to the Director. *Please note that we will not accept faxed applications.*

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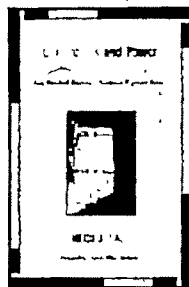
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